UNDER THE CHERRY TREES
The Symbolism of Cherry Blossoms during Hanami in Japan

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Karoliina Rankinen
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1 Introduction

Shikishima no Yamatogokoro wo hito towaba, asahi ni niou yamazakura bana.

Motoori Norinaga, 1790 (Gill 2007: 661)

If one wonders the soul of this ancient island, it is a mountain cherry fragrant in the morning sun.

(trans. Karoliina Rankinen 2016)

The poem above, written by a nationalist philosopher Norinaga Motoori (1730-1801) at the end of Edo period (1603-1868), is one of the most popular examples used to describe the meaning of the cherry blossoms in Japan. Motoori connected the superiority of Japan’s cherry blossoms to the superiority of Japan, the ideology of his and his nationalist comrades. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 32; Asquith & Kalland 1997: 152; Shirane 2012: 169). This nationalistic thinking was used to strengthen Japanese identity and nation after Japan opened its borders to outside world after spending 250 years in isolation. Japan had to start think of its own place and identity in the world. One of the most prominent nationalistic symbols came to be the cherry blossom because of its vast influence on Japanese culture and its status as a native plant. Because of its long history in Japanese culture, the meaning of cherry blossoms has transformed multiple times and used in several ways, for different purposes. Something filled with so many emotions and meanings as the cherry blossom deserves to be studied. Because the cherry blossoms symbolism has had so strong impact to Japanese culture, I recognize that doing a fully comprehensive study would be impossible. For this reason, I’ve limited this study to the living flowers admired during hanami (a cherry blossom viewing), a traditional Japanese ritual.

“...cherry blossoms occupy a unique role; no other flower, including plum blossoms, can compete.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 43).

In Chapter 4, I’ll briefly sum up the history of cherry blossom in Japan as I believe it’s necessary for understanding how cherished flowers cherry blossoms are, and how deeply rooted their status as a key symbol is. However, although it is important to know the origin and history to which the cherry blossom’s cultural position is based on, it is merely a background information for this study. The focus is on today’s practices and symbolism.
Cherry blossom’s role in Japanese culture is remarkable and spread in many cultural areas, from poetry and art to naming and cooking, which is why Japanese researchers talk of the “sakura bunka”, cherry blossom culture (Ogawa 2011; Satou 2005; Shirahata 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to understand cherry blossom’s position to comprehend the Japanese culture. All things that are valued and held traditional in Japan can be found reflected in the cherry blossoms. Through cherry blossoms, it’s possible to get a grasp on the Japanese worldview. As a symbol, it is a key to Japanese philosophy. The symbolism associated with the cherry blossoms, like with every symbol, is multivocal, enabling its diverse use.

Although cherry blossoms have been for centuries one of the main topics of research in Japan, the research in the West has been almost nonexistent. The existing literature is either history oriented or otherwise outdated, which partly encouraged me to write this thesis. As an example, it was mentioned that people bring their karaoke machines to the hanami (Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 225) but through interviews it came clear that this was a long time ago. In fact, nowadays the use of karaoke machines has been prohibited in the most hanami spots (Shirahata 2015: 12).

1.1 Background Information

The very first touch I had to Japanese culture was during 2nd grade in elementary school, when a Japanese woman clad in kimono kept a presentation of Japan. I can still vividly remember the pictures that were shown. The most memorable was one with people walking under trees, which were overflowing of pink flowers, forming a large, pink cloud that spread to the whole area. Later, I found out that these flowers
were cherry blossoms. For me, Japan seemed like a wonderland. From there on, I was completely mesmerized by Japan and its wonders. It could be said that the Japanese culture was the one that made me interested in anthropology. Compared to what I had seen so far at the time, Japan seemed like a unique, even mystical, wonderland.

This prompted me to apply for an exchange in Japan after entering the university. I studied a year at University of Hokkaido in Sapporo, North Japan, during 2011-2012. Although I had already studied Japanese culture and language through both academically and as a pastime activity, the year in Japan gave me a new depth in understanding the Japanese culture, and offered a first-hand insight to the Japanese society. During my exchange year I became fluent in Japanese, confident enough to execute interviews in Japanese and exploit the written materials in Japanese.

As Japan has had a great importance in my life, it felt natural to choose it as a theme for my Master’s thesis. However, it was a great challenge to choose the more accurate subject. After researching Western literature regarding Japan, I concluded that there was already enough research made of subjects like tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Majority told of something that was special and/or expensive even to the Japanese themselves. I wanted to research something that was accessible to every Japanese regardless person’s wealth or background, something that would represents Japanese culture itself.

While thinking this, the image of cherry blossom kept coming back to my mind. After all, from the very beginning, cherry blossoms represented Japan to me. After studying and spending time in Japan, it became apparent that it wasn’t just me: cherry blossoms were, and are, special in Japan. They can be found everywhere in Japanese society, starting from 100 yen coin. Many things have named after sakura (cherry blossom), from buildings and events to people and organizations, been used as a motif. A visitor in Japan cannot avoid encountering cherry blossoms in some form, especially in April.

**Picture 2. Cherry Blossoms at Shinjuku Gyoen**
1.2 Research Problem

My aim in this thesis is not to do a cross-cultural research, but, as Geertz, let the locals write of their own culture. Then I translate it for the people outside the culture may gain insider’s viewpoint. Although I don’t mean to make many comparisons to Western culture, in order to open the Japanese philosophy to the Western readers, I find that there are cases where I must do so, to translate the Japanese culture into an understandable form to those not familiar to it.

In the Western literature, as mentioned before, information is either outdated or shallow. There is a need for an update, and a demand for “thick description”, to borrow Clifford Geertz’s term. As a result, the research’s main goals are to introduce the hanami tradition, and find out what the cherry blossoms symbolizes in the Japanese culture in modern era.

- What is hanami and its purpose in today’s Japan?
- What symbolic meanings cherry blossoms carry in Japan today?

From the beginning I knew that because of the long history and multivocal nature of cherry blossom’s symbolism, it would be a difficult subject to study. At one point, I considered dropping either hanami or cherry blossom’s symbolism but I came to realize that it would be impossible to research one without the other (Takagi 1996: 39). Especially when the target audience of the study are not familiar with neither Japanese culture nor history.

![Picture 3. Hirosaki Castle’s Moat](image)
“In order to discuss the Japanese behavior surrounding this flower adequately, it is essential to understand the symbolism of the cherry blossom – its multivocality and historical changes.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 213). In her book about the use of the monkey as a metaphor in Japan, Ohnuki-Tierney (1987: 17) laments her impossible task to attempt “to interpret Japanese culture through its [monkey metaphor’s] entire history.” She recognizes her work having points that should have been researched more deeply and explained in more details. While recognizing these flaws, she continues hoping that her research will help “readers interested in symbols, rituals and the study of culture through time.” In the same way, knowing fully well that I’ll only be able to scratch the surface in this research, I hope that this will help those interested to get a better understanding of Japanese culture through cherry blossom.
2 Research Methods

In English, there is very little academic research done about cherry blossoms, despite their prominent role in Japanese culture. Only Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney has done comprehensive study about them, although she does concentrate on the historical viewpoint, specializing on the period of WW2 when cherry blossoms were capitalized for imperialistic purposes. I also found Robin D. Gill’s book, where he approaches cherry blossoms symbolism and usage by interpreting poetry. As there is no much information about cherry blossoms in English, I turned to Ruth Benedict’s famous study The Chrysanthemum and the Sword (1954), hoping to gather information on chrysanthemum, for comparison’s sake. However, chrysanthemum was only mentioned few times and mainly used by author to describe her own ideas, not Japanese symbolism. Aside from that, many things Benedict mentions in her book are already utterly outdated. It made me realize how outdated the anthropological material on Japan truly is.

After going through the limited information available in English, I turned on the Japanese studies and literature. In Japanese, the problem was completely opposite, as cherry blossoms have been studied broadly from many angles in Japan. The Japanese literature regarding the cherry blossoms can be divided to three main categories (Katsuki 2015). The first one is “the cherry blossom as an object of hanami”, the second is “the cherry blossom as a cultural subject” and the third one, “cherry blossom as a living being.” The third one refers to biological study, and surprisingly is the smallest category out of these three. The largest one is the second, covering the cherry blossom’s usage as a motif in both daily life and arts. Especially poetry is a popular topic. My own study falls under the first category, cherry blossom as an object of hanami. From the flood of information, I picked studies that concentrated on cultural aspect and were written by professors specializing to cherry blossoms.

The common thing in Japanese researches on cherry blossom is that all try to answer to the question “why cherry blossoms are so much loved by Japanese” (Katsuki 2015; Ogawa 2011; Takagi 1996; Tanaka 2003). Japanese authors, writing for the Japanese public, don’t usually question, do Japanese truly love cherry blossoms, but take it as a fact. Another common factor is that all these book try to find answer by interpreting literature, especially poems, rather than interviews. In most of the books, the question is where the love towards cherry blossoms comes from, not what it currently is. As result, Japanese cultural research on cherry blossoms concentrates heavily on the historical viewpoint, relying on myths, stories and poems (Kitakage 2012; Mizuhara 2014; Satou 2014). Apart from academic studies and articles, I have also read several Japanese guidebooks and journals of those who’ve travelled to view cherry blossoms in different prefectures. The cherry blossom guidebooks have long history in Japan, first one appearing already on 1710 (Tanaka 2003: 122).

While lots have been written about cherry blossom itself, there is very little written about hanami, the fact that Shirahata Yozaburo laments (Shirahata 2015:152-157). I find this understandable, as hanami is always adapting to environments changes. The
more you study about cherry blossoms, the more you realize that there is still lot more to research on, the fact that hasn’t gotten unnoticed by other researchers (Katsuki 2015:10).

2.1 Participant Observation

By being a long archipelago, Japan is divided by many different climate zones, and physical environment, ocean, mountains, rivers e.g., every prefecture in Japan has its own special features and local culture that have been able to grow independently from each other (Vesterinen 1987: 70). These are the major factors that guided me to choose the research sites for my ethnographic fieldwork (Picture 4). Because of the climate zones, the cherry blossoms’ blooming time differs greatly depending on location. In interviews it was clear that this time interval, the earliest blooming starting at the end of March while the latest starts at the beginning of May, influences significantly in the way both cherry blossoms and hanami are perceived. For the wider perspective, I felt it necessary to travel from south to north along with the blooming. Including cultural differences between prefectures, this showed importance of the location for both hanami and the cherry blossom symbolism.

I personally experienced hanami for the first time in April 2012 at the Ueno Park’s amusement park during my exchange year, so I had already some level of experience regarding the hanami practice before deciding the subject. In research purposes, I made four trips to Japan. The first time was two weeks trip in March 2015 to

![Picture 4. The Research Locations](image-url)
Fukuoka and Tokyo. At the time I was still unsure of the thesis’s theme, balancing between several options. Close to the ruins of Fukuoka Castle there was an annual event called Fukuoka Castle Ruins’ \textit{Sakura Matsuri} (Cherry Blossom Festival). Unlike during my experience in Ueno, this time there were lots of food stalls (yatai) where people could buy festival food while enjoying cherry blossoms. They also had cherry blossom light-ups in three locations that could be viewed for payment. Seeing firsthand significance of the cherry blossoms, I decided to make my thesis on cherry blossoms.

There was another two weeks trip in December 2015, traveling to Fukuoka, Tokyo, Nagoya and Sendai. The main objective of this trip was to gather Japanese material and to perform some test interviews to understand the cherry blossom phenomenon, and clarify that the research methods and point of views chosen were suitable for research. I would have liked to do some participant observation but as cherry trees only flower during spring, it was not possible and had to be left for the next time. Fukuoka is the most southern city in my study. Although I would have liked to include even more southern parts to the study, the financial situation at the time forced me to rule this out.

My third research trip to Japan occurred during the hanami season of 2016, from March to May. This time I stayed approximately one and half month in Japan, traveling from south to north with the cherry blossoms, following the \textit{sakura zensen}. According to plans, I stopped at Nagoya, Kyoto, Tokyo, Sendai and Sapporo. While traveling, I heard several informants to compliment the magnificence of Hirosaki’s cherry trees and decided to make a detour there while returning from Sapporo, the most northern city included to my study. While the main objective of the observation was the hanami in its many shapes (festivals, light-ups, parks etc.), the observation wasn’t limited just to hanami. I also observed, how surroundings were affected by cherry blossoms season and so kept my eyes open for everything connected to cherry blossoms while in town. The use of cherry blossom season in advertisement is quite equivalent to Christmas, the magazines and ads filled with articles about cherry blossoms. Restaurants and cafés offer seasonal consumables like \textit{sakura} (cherry blossom) lattes, sakura roll cakes, sakura ice creams, sakura teas and even sakura sausages! Stations and other public places were decorated in the spirit of season and shops packed with cherry blossom products. The cherry products are almost nonexistent but if you want cherry blossom products, you can be sure to find them.

Fourth trip happened in April 2017, when I travelled to Himeji, Nikko, Tokyo and Nara for two weeks. Himeji is famous for its cherry blossoms at the castle side, often titled as one of the most beautiful sceneries in whole Japan. Nikko and Nara I chose for their cultural and historical importance. This time I managed to make it to the full-bloom (\textit{mankai}), the best blooming time. It is difficult to make it to mankai, as the time of blooming is so short (Kurita 2001: 5-6).

Participant observation on its own is not seen as an effective method but accompanied with interviews and other research methods it can be quite productive (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002: 85). In cases, where there is barely any background
information, it is recommended to use participant observation. Knowing and understanding are completely different things, no matter how many interviews are conducted and what literature is read, it’ll never substitute a firsthand experience. Participating makes it possible to feel what informants feel in the places they occupy and act in, allowing the researcher to have a new level of understanding (Fernandez 2003: 187). It’s also good to remember that what people think they do and what they actually do, are two different things. An informant might unintentionally leave crucial information out, thinking it to be either irrelevant or obvious. Participant observation reveals things which won’t come up during an interview. The direct involvement is an excellent method to gather information from insider’s point of view. “Through participation, the researcher is able to observe and experience the meaning and interactions of people from the role of insider;” recaps perfectly the whole point of participant observation (Jorgensen 1989: 9, 15, 21, 36). In participant observation researcher has double-role, as a researcher, and as a participant. For reflectivity, it is important for researcher to realize their own role and influence to surroundings. In participant observation, the researcher’s persona is the greatest tool. (Grönfors 2001: 125).

The documentation of participant observation included keeping fieldwork journals, several small notebooks I had with me all the time. In these, I wrote everything I experienced through my five senses, including my thoughts regarding these observations. I also wrote some interviews to the notes, those that were not recorded for various reasons, for example because of background noise, talking while walking etc. I documented these conversations on notebooks immediately afterwards while they were in fresh memory, sometimes even during interview. I also took many photographs. As taking photographs is an essential part of the *hanami* in modern

**Picture 5. Photographing in Shinjuku Gyoen**
Japan, in this way it was also a part of participant observation, aside from documentation. Even the photographs are not free of self-reflection. When taking and selecting the pictures, people do these with culture-bound choices. Edward T. Hall explained (2003: 57), how during the study with lower-class American Negro subjects he used both a white assistant and a local Negro as a photographer. There was a great difference as some significant acts in the middle of the speech were too subtle for to outsider to pick or seen as insignificant. During my fieldwork, I took total of 1264 pictures, using both camera and smartphone.

2.2 Semi-structured Interview

I interviewed 17, from which 2 were Chinese, present during the group interview. Rest of the informants were Japanese. The age range was 20-50 years. The interviews were sometimes held in informants’ home but mostly they were public places recommended by the informant. All interviews were conducted in Japanese and in Japan, except for one that was held in Finland. The large majority of informants were women, 12, while there was only 4 men. I also interviewed 7 other person, but these were not recorded, for situational reasons. Out of these 3 were men, aged between 25-60, and 4 were women, aged from 20-50. Most of the interviews were conducted one-on-one but there was one group interview at Tohoku University that was held after student’s laboratory meeting for informants’ convenience. There were five people present during the group interview, 3 Japanese and 2 Chinese. Although I tend to prefer one-on-one interviews, the group interview was very enlightening. I was especially interested of the debates between informants that brought up the local differences.

Because of the literature review and personal past experiences, I already had my own opinion regarding the symbolism of cherry blossoms and assumptions of what kind of answers could be given. I had to be careful not to lead informants to the direction I thought to be right. In Japan, people often tell what they think the one listening wants to hear, as it is considered polite (Hendry 1999: 4). The instructions, “there are no right answers” and “I would like to hear your opinion on this matter” were necessary.

Although at one point I was recommended to use survey sheets for wider pool of information, I decided against them. Considering the theme it seemed unwise to use surveys in a subject that leaned so heavily on symbolism and would most likely require follow-up questions. I chose to use the semi-structured interview in my interviews as a way to give informants a freedom to speak their mind on the subject, only helping them when they struggled for finding words. I have always preferred the conversational nature of interviews.

All interviews were started by making questions about hanami, for example “what kind of hanami experiences do you have?” It was more natural to start interviews by questions based on informant’s actions and experiences that they most likely find easy to answer, rather than by start question meanings of the flower. From there, changing the topic to more abstract subjects, like feelings and meanings, was effortless. This also relaxed informants, as they are able to feel that they have
answers to questions. This technique, where interviewer starts from large, open-ended questions and then continues to clarifying, specific questions is called a funnel technique. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1993: 87).

2.3 Analyze Methods

Sherry B. Ortner (1973) lists two methods for establishing symbols as a key symbols. First one analyzes the system for its underlying elements. Then try to find a figure, image etc. which seems to formulate these underlying elements in its purest form. The second one is to observe the cultural interest, be it object, gesture etc., and then analyze its meanings. The first one starts from finding out the values, meanings, ideas that are at the core of culture and the trying to find the symbols for this elements. Meanwhile, the second one first finds out the symbol that is considered to be in central position in society and then find out the meanings that are implemented on this special symbol. During my long acquaintance with Japanese culture, I had already noticed that cherry blossom is a special flower in Japan, more so than any other flower (Kurita 2001: 7; Shirahata 2015: 183). Therefore, my interest lies in knowing the meanings it holds in Japanese society today.

I started to analyze the interviews by writing them down from word to word in Japanese. After that, I underlined the lines considered relevant for research while dividing them to two main category: cherry blossom and hanami. From there, I began to analyze the lines more deeply, first dividing them to big categories and worked down to even smaller categories, subcategories. Hanami was divided to the subcategories social patterns and activities. There, I went to even smaller subcategories, social patterns were divided to university life, work life etc. Usually this is done in the opposite way by summarizing the main point of sentences into a category. There, categories similar to one another are summed up to a bigger category, all till a main category. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002). In writing, I had to struggle with order of topics. Should I tell first about hanami or cherry blossom? There is no hanami without cherry blossom and it is impossible to think cherry blossom without hanami (Takagi 1996; 39). This paradox makes it impossible to speak of either one without overlapping with another. After carefully considering the options, I decided to start with hanami, the practical side, and move to cherry blossom from there, in the same way as I did in interviews.

The next step, translation, was challenging, one of the main problems encountered during the writing process. Not only are the Japanese letters completely different from the alphabet but the meanings of words are also challenging for translate. According to Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, languages show us different systems of how people perceive the world. Japanese have several words to describe the ways of petals and leaves falling and emotions it wakens. Language is not just about understanding words but also the cultural behavior and structure behind them. (Moore 1997: 88-90). Language tends to emphasize words that are important to the culture. In Japan’s case, it’s emotions, human relationships and aesthetics which can also be deduced from Japanese dictionary. There are countless words to describe emotions which don’t have English equivalent. (Vesterinen 1987: 261). As emotion-
based language, Japanese is difficult to translate without changing the meaning of a word. The most difficult part in translating the Japanese language comes from the fact that there are many terms used in daily life which relate to the aesthetics or feeling and are difficult to translate without giving detailed explanations (Servomaa 2007: 38). This cultural aspect of the language has always been the hardest part of studying Japanese culture. As a result, many words are left untranslated and instead word is explained. (Eväsoja 2008: 25). I also chose to leave some words untranslated so that their meanings would be conveyed as accurately as possible.

“An important part of...fieldwork, is to learn the language of the people concerned. ...it is essential anywhere to gain an understanding of the way the world is seen and described by the people concerned. Anthropologists have found that working with interpreters gives a wholly inadequate view, for first-hand knowledge of a language is the only way to become fully aware of the meanings and implications of the words used, which might be very different from straight dictionary translations.” (Hendry 1999: 3).

One of the most difficult decision was regarding should I use a word cherry blossom viewing or hanami? I ended up choosing hanami. The most prominent reason for this was to emphasize the uniqueness of this tradition. In the world, there are festivals and events that in a way remind hanami but are still hardly the same (Shirahata 2015; Tanaka 2003: 18). Mere “cherry blossom viewing” felt oversimplifying the term.
3 Theoretical Framework

From anthropological standpoint, ritual and symbol are both terms based on experience. Rituals are repeated and recreated from one generation to another because the people of society achieve something by acting according these rituals. Be it a social, emotional or physical achievement, there is always a purpose, a meaning to the ritual actions. These meanings are often represented by symbols central to the ritual. Symbols, and the meanings stored in them, often woke emotions, thus instigating an action. Ritual is therefore a behavioral counterpart to a symbol. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 2). Therefore, in order to understand the ritual, it is crucial to interpret the symbol.

Hanami as a ritual has been practiced all across Japan for centuries. Along with the passing time there have been some changes, yet people still continue to gather every spring under the cherry blossoms every spring. From the start, the main interest of this thesis has been on the symbolism linked to cherry blossoms during hanami ritual. However, the cherry blossom acts not only as a key symbol in this ritual but has a significant position in Japanese culture in whole. Halfway during the ethnographic research, I started notice a repeating pattern, where time appeared repeatedly as an underlying main category. When reanalyzing the material, two main categories became apparent from the text: time and space. The most essential part of the hanami ritual and, as its key symbol, the cherry blossoms symbolism, were easy to summarize into these two terms.

3.1 Interpretive Anthropology

Evan-Pritchard developed the idea of anthropology as a “translation of culture,” smoothing the way for interpretive anthropology (Barnard 2000: 158-163). However, the idea was still underdeveloped, and was left to be further developed by others, like Clifford Geertz, who saw anthropology as an act of translating cultures, often using an allegory “text” when talking about anthropological research. Culture is a group of texts written by those belonging to the culture, the natives, who are “saying something of something”. Anthropologist job is to read over the writer’s shoulders and interpret text to understandable form for those not belonging the group. (Geertz 1973: 452-453). Geertz saw human world to be intersubjective, brought about by a trafficking in symbol. Therefore, culture is a public, acted document where a meaning is an interpretive response to act. The symbolic interactionism was also Herbert Blumer’s approach to symbols, the way people respond to objects is based on the meanings embedded to the objects. The meaning then comes from the negotiated experience of social interaction. (Richardson 2003: 75). Geertz and Blumer were both interested in people’s responses to symbols.

To Geertz, anthropologist’s job was to provide “thick descriptions”, a term borrowed from Gilbert Ryle. While “thin description” tells what is being done, the thick description explains the motives behind the act, what it means and its purpose. (Geertz 1973: 7). Lawrence A. Kuznar saw thick description as a demanding job for
the anthropologist, “*who must disentangle and decode the complex meanings of actions, words, and ideas in a culture – thick description is the ethnographic result.***” (Kuznar 2008: 90-91). Although demanding, thick description is needed for understanding the reasons behind people’s behavior. The same ritual, and symbol it’s based on, may have different meanings to different individuals, even inside the same culture. The social actors may agree on a way ritual activity is conducted but not on what the activity is supposed to express, especially if the symbol behind the ritual is a multivocal one. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 281). Sometimes it might not even be clear to participants what symbolic action means, they have dissimilar interpretations or they might have different motives for participation. The social aspect is usually a significant part of the ritual, sometimes even outweighing the originally designated purpose of the ritual. (Bell 2009: 183; Hendry 1999: 67).

In contrast, Victor Turner’s theories were much more action-oriented. Although symbols and meanings have a central part in Turner’s thinking, as understanding culture requires identifying the multiple meanings of symbols, but he sees a little value in them without a context to the dynamics of social life. Symbols have power and meaning only when they are used in social exchanges, like rituals. They always need some action to serve as their context. (Moore 1997: 212).

### 3.2 Rituals and Symbols

Terms ritual and rite are often used in context of religions, many anthropological researches about them centering heavily on belief systems. However, both can be comprehended in many ways. Mary Douglas describes a rite as a blend of actions and a collection of symbols associated to a particular rite, connecting widely differing patterns of society to a single form. (Douglas 1999: 155, 288). She also point out that rituals aren’t unchanging. People practicing rituals might feel that they are being controlled by fixed ideas made since beginning of times but people unconsciously change their own culture by practicing it. Alternations in rituals, beliefs and symbols go unnoticed until someone brings them up. (Douglas 1999: 170).

Victor Turner also saw a ritual as a social action and a dynamic movement, changing along with the culture (Turner 1974: 55). Turner strongly stressed the temporal nature of rituals, describing society as a tide that never stops and is always “flowing”. (Turner 1974: 37). As a part of society, rituals are always developing and adapting, the whole idea of rituals being that they represent changes happening in society and its social relations. “*The social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being...*” (Turner 1974: 24). Nothing is static, all is in a constant motion. Even the formal structures, seemingly static, are on the movement. These social activities usually involve systematic repetition of acts that stay seemingly same, although they are slowly altered along with the time. Turner calls this “slow process”, “...*some social flows move so slowly relatively to others that they seem almost as fixed and stationary...*” (Turner 1974: 44).
While Victor Turner speaks of actions and ritual, Geertz uses terms behavior and control mechanisms. To Geertz, even the conception of thinking is a public social act based on culture patterns. By this he meant that thought doesn’t consist of mysterious processes located inside the person’s head but “a traffic in significant symbols upon which men have impressed meaning” based on their experience (Geertz 1973: 362-363). By culture patterns Geertz refers to ordered clusters of significant symbols that help a person to make a sense of the world he lives in. Studying culture thus means understanding of the total assemblage of these patterns that guide people in a bizarre world. (Geertz 1973: 362-363). The way people behave during their everyday lifestyle and a ritual is just a summary of this, teaching participants how to control oneself and appropriate behavior, a fusion of the imagined world and the lived world reflected in a set of symbolic forms (Geertz 1973: 112).

In Turner’s theory, a symbol is involved in social processes as the smallest unit of a ritual. Therefore they should be considered within the fields of social action. “The symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends, and means, whether these are explicitly formulated of have to be inferred from the observed behavior. The structure and properties of a symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action,” (Turner 1967: 20). In other words, the symbol’s meaning changes according to context it’s presented. As an example the American flag takes a totally different meaning depending is it on a flag post in a school yard, or on the casket of slain soldier. Sometimes, if the actors are asked to explain the symbolism outside its activity context, they are unable to. (Turner 1967; Moore 1997: 232-233).

Symbols don’t appear from nothing. They have a background, making it useless to inspect symbols one by one. The culture itself needs to be understood and known to really get the symbol, things left unspoken. (Douglas 1999: vii). Along with the culture, symbols and their meanings are in the state of constant evolution. Even though meanings behind symbols don’t stay same forever, the old meanings won’t just disappear. Using the monkey’s symbolism as an example, Ohnuki-Tierney explains how meaning of the symbol can slowly change with the time while not lose its original messages. Instead, one meaning becomes periodically more dominant. Depending on the context, a symbol exhibits its intended meaning. “...from the earliest times in Japanese history, at different times in history, a particular meaning becomes dominant.” (Onhuki-Tierney 1987: 41). In order to explain the structures of symbolic meanings, Ohnuki-Tierney uses terms basic structure, processual structure, and contextual structure. By basic structure, she refers to the structure of meaning, where the process and the context of the act are necessary to determine symbolic meanings of acts and objects. Processual structure means a case where the structure of meaning transforms during the act. Contextual structure refers both the historical context and the context of the act. (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 163-165).

The basis of a ritual, or any social action, is on symbols that epitomize what is valued in the culture at the present (Turner 1974: 55). In Turner’s studies symbols, the instigators of social actions, are essential for understanding ritual’s purposes and goals. Turner saw a ritual as a form of a symbolic communication between the
participants, having the power to evoke participants to take action (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 216).

Because even the individuals of the same culture often have differing opinions of the use of symbols, Clifford Geertz sees no point in trying to find some large, universal structure that would inevitably lead to misunderstandings. Instead, anthropologist should focus on interpreting cultural events within a specific code of meanings, the core values. In order to stay existing in society, symbols need to create experiences, so that they leave an impression to people. Thus, if symbols, or any part of culture in the matter of fact, is not practiced, they simply disappear. (Moore 1997: 213, 234).

3.2.1 Key Symbols

Key symbol, a term used by Sherry B. Ortner (1973), refers to a symbol that has more significant role in the culture than other symbols. Ortner names five indicators that can be used to determinate if a symbol is a key symbol for a culture, by measuring the symbol’s cultural importance.

1. Native tells us that X is important
2. Natives are not indifferent regarding X, but react to it either positively or negatively
3. X comes up in many different contexts, both behavioral (actions, conversations etc.) and systemic (rituals, arts, myths etc.) ones
4. There is a greater cultural elaboration surrounding X, for example in the form of elaborating vocabulary surrounding X or elaborating details of X’s nature
5. There are cultural restrictions surrounding X, meaning that there are rules and sanctions of X’s misuse

There are many other names for key symbols, for example Victor Turner uses a term dominant symbol (1967) and Schneider a core symbol. I prefer the term key symbol, as it seems to describe the term best. The key symbol doesn’t exist just to fulfill the purpose of ritual, it represents the values that are regarded in high degree in the society. Turner counts three important property that should be found in these type of symbols:

1. Condensation
2. Unification of disparate significata
3. Polarization of meaning

The 1st, condensation, means that many things and actions are mingled and represented in a single formation, essentially meaning that symbols are multivocal. The 2nd point, unification of disparate significata, where significata can be translated
as underlying meanings of the symbol, means a symbol where different significatas are united. *Polarization of meaning* shows that key symbols can be divided to two distinguishable pole of meanings. At the “ideological pole” the meanings are connected to culture’s moral and social orders, norms and values that by guiding and controlling the member of the society hold the group together and in order, and at the “sensory pole”, meanings are connected to the outward qualities of the symbol. In Ndembu’s culture the milk tree was seen symbolize both breast milk and blood, which are both connected to ideological values, because it oozes both white and red liquids. These meanings at the sensory pole are expected to arouse feelings and desires. (Turner 1967: 28).

John Locke divides sensory pole’s qualities into three categories: Primary, secondary and emergent qualities. Primary qualities are external qualities like color, sound, state, situation etc. that can be perceived in the material world. Secondary qualities are internal qualities that are produced by interaction with the material world like taste, weight, warmth and other qualities induced in people interacting with the object. The emergent qualities are the complex feeling states, brought about by “synesthesia” of various qualities, usually induced by some kind of performance like a ritual. (Fernandez 2003: 187-190).

### 3.2.2 Rites of Passage

Rites of passage is Arnold Van Gennep’s theory of the type of rituals that indicate changes in state or status happening to an individual or a group, and how these rites seem to exist in every society of all level of complexity (Turner 1974: 196). In other words, “rites of passage” are cultural markers in the cycle of life, a movement from one socially defined phase to another (Adam 2004: 98). Van Gennep has influenced many remarkable anthropologists by his theory, including Victor Turner and Mary Douglas. According to Douglas, during the changes of statuses and states in the culture, rites of passages protect the permanence and the values of classification of society (Douglas 1999: 113).

The main types of passages can be divided in four categories:

1. The passage of people from one status to another
2. The passage from one place to another
3. The passage from one situation to another
4. The passage of time

The 1st passage implies a change similar to a marriage or an initiation rite for the new social or religious group. The 2nd passage means something like a change of address or other type of locational change. The 3rd passage means situation comparable to a new job or a school class. The 4th, the passage of time, occurs when the whole social
group experiences a move from one period to another, new reign of emperor, New Year or *hanami*, when the season changes from winter to spring. (Hendry 1999: 68).

Van Gennep theorized that most of the rituals are performed when an individual or a group have a change in state or status. Although there are differences in durations and traits, in many rituals three stages can be perceived:

1. Preliminal
2. Liminal
3. Proliminal

_Preliminal stage_, also known as the rites of separation, means the part of ritual when individual or group is still seen as part of their old status group. _Proliminal stage_, the rites of incorporation, is the final stage, when they are seen as part of the new status group. _Liminal stage_, the rites of transition, is the stage between, when participant/s is no longer part of their old group but also not yet part of new group. This is usually the moment when ritual takes its place, making the change of status or state easier and recognized by the society. If we take a betrothal as an example, we can say that betrothal is a liminal stage between an adolescence and a marriage. However, the betrothal itself has all three stages in it: first in the preliminal stage, the ritual is started by the question, a proposal, the both parties still being in their old status; liminal stage is an acceptance of proposal; after acceptance, both parties enter to a new social status, betrothed, this being the proliminal stage. (Turner 1974: 196; Hendry 1999: 69; van Gennep 1960: 11).

People are more likely to turn their attention to a liminal phase as it is the time of change, a state between two stages. The sense of timing in social affairs is made up from interruptions and irregularities that give people’s lives their pace (James & Mills 2005: 5). “People have the ability to switch between one social context and another, between one time-frame and another; hence they experience different forms of identity or even aspects of their own personhood.” (James & Mills 2005: 246).

The passage of time is something that people are constantly aware of and they keep track of, as the changes affect the rhythm of life. The passage of time is observable in many ways: through the natural phenomena, like the alterations of the moon or the growth of plants; by marking the society’s annual rhythm, like annual rituals or household activities; through preservation of history, legend and stories. (Geertz 1973: 389).

According to van Gennep, the life is in a constant transition. "The life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another...” (van Gennep 1960: 2). Although van Gennep is more centered in the rites of passage in an individual’s or group’s stage of life, such as birth, initiation, marriage, funeral, he also applies his theories in the research of seasonal rites, “...rites which accompany and bring about the change of the year, the season, or the month...” (van Gennep 1960: 178), in another words, passage of time. Seasonal rites are a cyclical part of
the life, not only an individual’s but a society’s life as well, as the whole society moves to another stage of life. These type of rites usually have social purpose aside of merely celebrating the change of a year, a season etc. As an example for his theory, he uses Peking’s New Year tradition. In China the whole family, including relatives, will gather to eat on the last day of the year, no matter how much differences there are among the family members. The main point of the New Year’s celebration is to “make the whole group cohesive” to pray in front of the ancestors and leave disagreements behind. In the same way, the ceremonies related to the change of season have their ulterior motive. Hanami tradition is to welcome a new season, the spring, but it also has a more social motive, to welcome the new members to the group. As the rites of passage are used to cushion the transitional period, most of the seasonal rites happen when the next season is welcomed.

3.3 Time and Space in Anthropology

Time and space have their own roles in rituals, as rituals are held in specific time and place. The ritual can be held annually or at the certain point of individual’s life stage. Some rituals have fixed date, like New Year celebrations and Christmas, while some are held during a specific season but have much more leeway, like harvest and spring-cleaning. More often than not, rituals are also connected to places. For example, wedding ceremonies are usually held in a church. If wedding is held at some other place, it is usually mentioned in description, for example a beach wedding or a courthouse wedding. Because of their strong connection, it is difficult to speak about the experience of time without space and vice versa. The passage of time can be perceived by the changes that the space and its objects go through during a certain period of time. By individual and collective experiences during one’s lifetime, the way society and individual perceive and use the surroundings may change drastically. If we take a cherry tree in Japan as an example, the change that tree goes through during its blooming period informs people of the time passing and seasons changing. Regarding the experience of the space, during the blooming period the trees, that were mostly ignored while they were bare, become the center piece of the surroundings.

From anthropological aspect the important question with both time and space is, how they are experienced. There are two ways of processing experience: normal and symbolic. Normal refers to subject-object world we operate and interact in by routines and procedures induced by signals. Symbolic refers to processing where these everyday routines are challenged and unusual associations evoked. (Fernandez 2003: 187). Every culture has their own understanding of time and space and how these should be measured, understood and perceived. As such, time and space cannot be treated as universal beings, but as culture relative subjects. Not only vary how these two are understood and experienced culturally but also individually. Two persons from the same culture can understand the same landscape and experience the same amount of time very differently.

Time
Starting from Antic Greek, people have tried to understand and organize time. Plato divided world into two realms: a world of phenomena, the temporal realm of substance and change experienced through the five senses; and a timeless world of noumena, the realm of eternal ideas outside the temporal realm. Aristotle saw time as a measure of the motion. (Adam 2004: 19, 26-8). The definition of time as a measurement has been in a central place in all sectors of science, especially physics. Perhaps the most famous examples being Isaac Newton, to whom time was the duration between events, and Albert Einstein. Albert Einstein’s Theories of Relativity (1905 & 1915) may have their roots in physics, but have also left their mark on social studies, for example in David Harvey’s concept of space-time. While Einstein largely accepted the Newtonian definition of time and saw it as a measure, he didn’t find time to be absolute, but relative to observer and their state. This experience of time that has been central focus in the anthropology of time, for instance in the case of Enlightenment theorists to whom time was dependent on human mind. (Adam 2004: 30-34, 61-62; Delaney 2011: 83; James & Mills 2005: 13). There have been two major anthropological approaches to time. The first puts emphasis on the culturally-embedded ways in which time is lived and marked. For example, from Durkheimian perspective social time was created through collective discourse of language and ritual practice. The second approach saw the participant’s perspective as a central element, being more philosophically-inclined approach rather than practice-inclined, for example Alfred Gell criticized Durkheimian time concept for been too focused on rituals, forgetting the everyday practices. (James & Mills 2005: 4, 156-7, 235). Generally, anthropological studies are mostly interested in what people do with their time, traditionally highlight one of these 3 concept: cultural conventions of measurement of the time; the symbolic structuring and representation of the time; or, the making of social time as a dimension of social practice. (James & Mills 2005: 1-2).

Time doesn’t have an absolute, universal definition. How it is experienced and felt by a person is subjective and tends to change during the person’s lifetime, hence time is formed by experience and action. To a person waiting their turn to ATM even a minute seems like an eternity, whereas to a student taking an exam a minute seems to pass all too fast. In larger scale, time is usually based on natural phenomena and the perception of this process. Time is therefore a movement measured by change. (Delaney 2011; Moilanen 2013: 18). How time is defined and used varies from a culture to culture, depending on the society’s needs, but all cultures seem to have a concept of time. “Rhythm of time does not necessarily model itself on the natural periodicities established by experience, but that societies contain within themselves the need and the means of instituting it,” as Henri Hubert put it (James & Mills 2005: 8). For example, anthropologists doing research in Africa noticed that the rural African societies didn’t have as strong reliance on a time as the Western world, days were not counted in calendar-way nor was a day divided to minutes or hours. After a while, researchers noticed that they themselves started to lose count of the days (Delaney 2011: 85-86). The basis of the time measurement thus lies in the needs of society, people having a need for rhythm in their lives. As Edmund Leach said, “...people need to punctuate the seamless flow of time, to give order and rhythm to their lives.” (Delaney 2011: 90).
According to Edmund Husserl’s theory, the future and the past are both existent in the present, present being an extension of the past and directed by the future. (Adam 2004: 56-57). George Herbert Mead had also a similar way of thought, although he saw that the past and the future are constructed in the present. What has taken place in the past is implicated in the present, as people in the present can interpret the past according to their wishes, while the future potential guides what happens in the present (Adam 2004: 64-66, 69; Hondru 2014: 47).

Space

The space, filled with objects, meanings and values, is the primary mean of orientation for humans to locate themselves and others, both physically, socially and cosmologically. Space is usually referred as the physical space experienced through the five senses. However, there are also others, like social and emotional spaces, understood only through personal experiences, influenced by society and its norms. Consequently, a place constructed by a different culture might seem like a different world, with strange norms, rules and values implemented to the space. (Cresswell 2004: 2; Delaney 2011: 37-38). Edward Hall goes as far as to claim that people from different cultures live in different sensory worlds, thus experiencing the space differently. As senses are often thought to be universal, this difference in the “sensory programming” makes it difficult to study cultures. (Hall 2003: 51-52). The experience of space shouldn’t be confused with the scientific concept of space. While all people face the reality of time and space, coping with it varies culturally, through many different perspectives and systems. (Kuper 2003: 247).

Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre divided space to three layers. First space is an objective and material space consisting of empirically measurable, mappable phenomena. Second space is a subjective and mental space of images and representations. These two spaces are binaries. The third space is the lived, meaningful space, the social space produced through social practice. (Cresswell 2004: 12, 38; Dodgshon 1998: 8-10). Much of human geography before the 60s was about the classification of regions by their characteristics, drawing boundaries, by describing and specifying differences (Cresswell 2004: 16; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 1).

Space from anthropological perspective has been studied widely in cultural geography, usually connected to Carl Sauer, who saw culture as an agent shaping the medium, natural landscape, resulting to a cultural landscape (Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995: 9). Coming to the 1970s, phenomenology and existentialism shifted the focus from the study of regions to the study of space, emphasizing subjectivity and experience. From 80s onward, cultural geographers saw place not just as an outcome of social process, but also as a tool in creation and maintenance of it. (Cresswell 2004: 16-20, 29). In the 90s, space was acknowledged to be an essential component of sociocultural theory, and the spatial dimensions in studies shifted from the background settings to study subject (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 1).
Space is a realm without meaning. By giving it a purpose, meanings and objects to support the purpose, the place is formed. Public places often have different meanings to different people, as one place may have different functions. Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003) call the study the relationship between humans and their environments, where space is transformed to a place by giving it a meaning as a study of inscribed spaces. Through the meanings, the experiences becomes embedded to the place, making it the space of memories. Thus, place and memory are intertwined, memories constructing meanings that create places. As a memory connects with the place, memories are place-oriented. Edward Casey even declared place as the container of experiences, while David Harvey explains place as a locus of collective memory, a site of identity creation through the construction of memories linking a group of people into the past. The place-memory contributes to the production and reproduction of the social memory, making the past become alive in the present. Therefore, meanings can also change with the time, permanently or periodically. Places are never finished but are produced through the repetition of practices. Place is a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world through attachments and connections between people and places, interplay of people and environment and worlds of meaning and experience. Hence, place is an aspect of the way people choose to think, deciding what to emphasize and what to see as unimportant. It affects to the way things are seen, researched and written. A place can therefore be defined as a meaningful location, which must be made, maintained and contested. (Cresswell 2004: 2-15, 61, 82-87; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 13).

Places are socially constructed, physical, experiential and emotional realities at particular times. From anthropological viewpoint, place is often seen either as an anthropological construct for “setting”, or as a socially constructed spatial experience. The same landscape can have many different realities depending on the perspective, affected by individual experiences. (Rodman 2003: 205-215). Hirsch observed two ways a landscape has been described in anthropological accounts: outsider’s and local’s standpoint. From outsider’s standpoint, an ethnographer composes a landscape into a text, describing how it’s initially seen by researcher, to act as a framing for the study. From local’s standpoint, an ethnographer describes how inhabitants compose a landscape into a text, reading meanings embedded. Local’s standpoint includes meanings imputed by locals to their cultural and physical surroundings and so is achievable to researcher only through fieldwork. (Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995: 1-5; Gray 2003: 227.) Eric Hirsch defined a landscape to be made of a relationship between the social life’s “foreground”, the concrete actuality of everyday social life, and “background”, the potential, ideal, imagined existence. Tension between these two creates a landscape that is a sum of physical environment and social meaning, as the background potentiality may change or transform the foreground. By a ritual this potentiality might become actuality, periodically or permanently. (Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995: 1-5; Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 13-16).

Miles Richardson theorized that a bodily experience transforms to a symbol, when body perceptions and experiences are objectified into an object, an artifact, a gesture, a word etc. Thus the experience is represented in symbol. (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 2). For this, there must first be a preliminary material setting. Next, during an
interaction with material setting and others, people respond to material setting by incorporating the preliminary definition of the setting in their behavior. This way, situation is objectified through the process, setting becoming a material image of the emerging situation. It is through people’s actions that the culture forms. (Richardson 2003: 76-88). Particular events and/or actions take place on a particular place as each site conveys limited range of messages, often linked to values. For example, shrine is linked to sacred, police station to authority and bank to substance. (Kuper 2003: 258).

Many study a place from a point of social activities practiced at a specific location based on cultural and historical contexts, like J.E. Malpas and De Certeau. According to David Seamon and Allan Pred place is a result of practices and their processes, where the essential, experiential character of place can be found through movements. Insiders seem to act naturally in their environment, their everyday movements having been formed to habits. Outsiders’ act clumsily as they don’t know or feel the surroundings as insiders do. (Cresswell 2004: 30-37; Gray 2003: 224-227). Being inside a place is same as identifying and belonging with it, including awareness of symbolic, deep significances of places and appreciation of identities. Being outside is the opposite of this. (Cresswell 2004: 44). According to James Fernandez, an identity is created through interactions with environment, where people and their environment affecting each other. By taking qualities of environment into themselves, people create metaphors to constitute their identities. Margaret Rodman defined place as socially constructed by locals living and knowing their surroundings that are politicized, culturally relative and historically specific. (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 14-15). The cultural worldview relies on society’s collective mental images, for example, few have been in outer space but many speak of it, relying to mental image. By symbolic means humans construct and live in spatially coordinated worlds that transcend individual experience (Delaney 2011: 42).

3.3.1 Japanese Time, Culture of Four Seasons

As a figure based on experience time doesn’t have an absolute or universal definition. How it’s experienced and felt by a person is subjective and tends to change during the person’s lifetime. The construct called time is hence formed by experience and action. In the large scale, the conception of time is based on natural phenomena, which are always in motion, and perception of process, and as such, time is a movement that is measured by change. (Moilanen 2013: 18). As the conception of time is a culture-bound, the Japanese one differs greatly from the Western one (Picture 6).
Although Japanese are very punctual, their conception of time is quite flexible. Unlike in Western culture, where time’s movement is considered to be linear, it is seen as cyclic in Japan. It could described as a circle with many other circles inside of it. (Moilanen 2013: 21). Along with the Gregorian calendar the Japanese calendar is also used. For example, the year 2016 is also the year Heisei 28 in Japanese calendar. The eras in Japanese calendar are named by the reigning Emperor and each era represents one reign: a new era starts when the Emperor’s reign starts and ends when the emperor dies, after which another Emperor’s reign, and new era, starts. Therefore the Japanese calendar expresses cyclical nature of time in Japan. However, time doesn’t just circle around, the circles also gradually move forward (Moilanen 2013: 198). The conception of the passage of time is multilayered in Japan and Japanese are very quick to take in different kinds of time concepts.

Franz Krause suggests that along with the natural phenomena, seasons should also be observed through the seasonal activities that are practiced. These annual cultural practices and the nature are in continuous interaction, creating the local seasonality through their interaction. Krause’s theory refutes the idea of seasons as a sum up of natural phenomena that humans are unable to affect. Instead, human and non-human phenomena weave together, their rhythmical interplay defining seasons in the culture. Seasons are dynamic, rhythmical interaction between nature and humans, continuously in movement. Krause continues by presenting two different anthropological approaches to define seasons: seasons as categorical blocks where focus is on language and concepts; and seasons as a rhythmical process, focus being on experience and practice. (Krause 2013: 4). The key point in seasons’ definition lies in the experiences and practices produced in the society. Society sees certain phenomena and practices linked to a specific season, it is quite understandable that people feel like the season hasn’t come yet, regardless what the calendar says. For example, even if according to calendar it should be a summer time, but certain activities, like swimming or barbequing, can’t be done, people feel that they can’t experience the summer.
Societies are tied to their environment, changing and moving along with it. This includes seasonal changes. Not all places have four seasons, and depending on the environment and the way it is used, the way seasonality is seen may vary. The Models of Time are often affected by what has an economic importance to the society, like the growth of vegetation. (Delaney 2011: 85; van Gennep 1960: 179). Australian aboriginals kept time by observing the blooming time of the flowers for the fruits and honey they gathered thus having a “flower time”. In same way, a fisher society has a tidal view of time and agriculturalist society follows seasonal time of their harvest. Our culture, dominated by machines, is often referred as a mechanical or a machine time. (Delaney 2011: 85; Adam 2004: 114). Thus we can deduce that in different cultures the concept of seasons and time depend on the combination of location, natural phenomena and in the way society use their surroundings. As a result, every culture has their own symbols for seasons. The seasons have strongly affected to the both symbolic meanings and the uses of flowers around the world. In Europe, the chrysanthemum is an autumn flower making it connected to autumnal rites for dead which is why it is improper to be offered to the living. In northern France, the Flanders poppy became a sign of Remembrance Day, more accurately a symbol of those who lost their lives for their country during the I World War so that their sacrifice would never be forgotten. (Goody 1993: 289-298).

The Japanese society values rituals because it values change (Berque 1995: 255). The constant state of predictable change, that the cycle of seasons represents, is highly appreciated in Japan. Every month has its own annual rites and celebrations that gives daily life its rhythm. The seasons can also be found in everyday life, in the form of seasonal food and decoration. Although Finland also has four seasons, our attitude towards them is vastly different from the Japanese one. In Finland, the seasons are to be taken granted, while in Japan they are precious luxury that offer aesthetic experiences to the mundane life. (Eväsoja 2008: 29).

Japan has a term called kisetsukan (季節感), roughly meaning, “to being aware of the cycle of seasons”. Like in Finland, Japan has four, vastly different seasons. A summer of heat and monsoons, an autumn when maple trees turn to different shades of red, a winter when all is covered in snow and finally a spring, the season of cherry blossoms. Because the separation of seasons is clearly observable, the cycle of seasons has an important role in Japanese culture, pivotal for the life rhythm. There are countless traditions concerning the four seasons and every season is a special occasion with its own specialties which the Japanese full-heartedly enjoy. (Eväsoja 2008: 27; Moilanen 2013: 38; Porrasmaa 2013: 235). The seasonality can be found everywhere in Japan. For example, majority of the handwritten letters start with seasonal greeting (kigo, 季語), a comment describing a current season. The seasonal reference not only establishes the time and setting, but makes a letter elegant and polite. The seasonal greetings can be found even in e-mails, especially work related ones. In business life, seasonal greetings are important as they are a form of politeness when communicating with a client. (Eväsoja 2008: 148; Shirane 2012).

"We have hanami for a spring(...)for every season there is a reason for everyone to gather, I guess people want that kind of motive. Like, in summer there is a Lantern
Festival, when relatives gather together(...)in winter there is a New Year, and before that there is a Christmas to enjoy... If you don’t have hanami, it doesn’t feel like spring.” (J1W26).

Japanese have since ancient times felt joy from spending time together with those important to them, while viewing the beautiful nature, effectively synchronizing their feelings with others and nature through seasonal phenomena. Japanese culture where four seasons are highly appreciated. The cherry blossoms are the most popular examples but during autumn maple leafs are viewed, as well as moon (tsukimi), and snow viewing (yukimi) is an activity of winter. While viewing the wonders of nature, it is common to eat things associated to this specific season. Unfortunately, in late years these traditions have been slowly lost, only hanami staying to remind of this tradition, although there are signs of tsukimi’s revival. Hanami is thus a survivor of a much larger tradition. (Benedict 1954: 292; Linhart & Frühstück 1998: 13; Satou 2014: 79, 84-85; Takagi 1996: 45). Among the seasons, spring has had a special spot in Japanese culture for long time and seen as the most important season.

3.3.2 Japanese Space and Nature Relationship

Japanese observe a space quite differently compared to westerners. In West, people perceive the arrangement of objects, seeing space as synonym to empty. In Japan, people perceive the shape and arrangements of space. Ma (間), between, is the basic building block in all Japanese spatial experience, thus empty space is meaningful and integral part of the overall design. In many cases, the distance between objects and what is not present is more important than what is present, therefore what is seen is not actually all that is present. (Delaney 2011: 61-62; Hendry 1993: 98).

Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro (1870-1945) considered differences between Western and Eastern worldviews to be that while the West saw reality as its ground, to the East nothingness was the ground. Nishida called these as reality as form (West) and reality as the formless (East). In other words, the Western worldview had a measurable, material world as its base, while in the Eastern worldview was based on formless things. He further compared the Japanese aesthetic culture to be similar to ancient Greece and China but separated them by stating that “…Greek culture was idealistic and intellectual and Chinese ritualistic and moral, Japanese culture was emotional.” (Servomaa 2007: 35-37). Murakami Haruki has said that the core of Japanese culture lies in the recognition that all is vulnerable. The life is born, lives and changes its appearance and then, without exception, vanishes. A human being is powerless against the nature and can only accept this. This altering, fragile world full of uncertainties is called mujō (無常). Because this worldview, Japanese culture is often called the culture of feeling. (Porrasmaa 2013: 201).

Nature relationship

Henri Lefebvre theorized space to be produced through social practice, products made of the raw material, the nature (Dodgshon 1998: 8). Nature, especially the nature-culture dichotomy, has always had an important part in anthropological
research. Many anthropological schools see nature as the basis of culture and therefore nature-culture opposition has been used as an analytical tool to make sense in rituals, symbols and other parts of social life. It should also be kept in mind that the concept of nature itself is a social construct, a constantly changing product of historical contexts and local culture. (Descola & Palsson 1996: 1-3, 15, 82). Robin Collingwood introduced three periods for European conceptions of nature: Medieval, when nature and humanity were seen as God’s creations, humanity being highly encompassed; Post-Renaissance, when approach to nature was more secular, although conception of nature was more abstract; and Industrial revolution, period when science rapidly evolved, and, in the need of resources, humanity and nature were seen in a subject-object –relationship. (Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995: 6).

Nature’s importance to cultures, and vice versa, cannot be stressed enough, after all the term “nature” itself is a cultural definition that is different in every culture (Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 29; Van Gennep 1960: 3). The environment society resides in is inseparable part of its people, customs and other cultural products. “...man’s life resembles nature, from which neither the individual nor the society stands independent” (Van Gennep 1960: 3). Servomaa criticizes how nature is seen mainly as “an infinite source of resources for the well-being and service of humans” by the current civilizations. People tend to remember only the material power offered by nature and forget its spiritual power, “the very spirit of life, which exists in humans as well as in nature, in the whole universe.” (Servomaa 2007: 174).

“...in the very basis of the Japanese view of the world there are deep feelings of reverence, adoration, appreciation, and enjoyment regarding the beauty of nature, yet also feelings of awe and fear towards mysterious and powerful forces of nature” (Servomaa 2007: 39).

For a long time, there wasn’t a word for “nature” in Japanese vocabulary that would have separated culture and nature. Only in Meiji era (1868-1912), when Japan was westernized in a rapid pace, “nature” (shizen 自然) and “culture” (bunka 文化 / bunmei 文明) were divided to two opposing categories according to the Western concept. Traditionally nature and man have been seen as parts of the whole, inseparable from one another. Nature was seen superior to man and was not challenged till after Western influences. (Iwatsuki 2013: 71; Kyburz 1997: 260; Servomaa 2007: 39). It should also be mentioned that the word “mountain”, yama in Japanese, is significantly different from its English counterpart. In Japan, the word refers to both mountains and forests, there being no clear distinction between the two. There is a word for just a forest (mori) but nothing that clearly separates mountains and forests. As over two-thirds of the land is made of mountain forests, there was no point to make distinction. The mountains were the sacred area of thousands kami, the opposite of the space inhabited by humans. A human entering to the mountains was a visitor and obligated to act as one towards all kami residing there by being respectful towards nature and performing the right rituals. (Iwatsuki 2013: 75; Knight 1996: 223).
Japanese nature relationship is heavily influenced by Shinto, nature has been worshipped as divine since ancient times. Shinto, the Japan’s native religion, is an animistic religion where respects and gratitude towards nature plays huge part. Gods and humans, supernatural and natural, aren’t separated but live side by side in a constant interaction. Mountains, trees and rivers are believed to have kami residing in them. Kami, Japanese deities, are often considered to be formless power that is present in everything, for example objects, animals, individuals and even phenomena. Even human could become a kami, through some unusual experience. Kami are seen to be very humane, ambivalent characters whom can be seen in both positive and negative light depending on its mood. If annoyed, a benevolent kami can turn into a vengeful kami. Because of this, rituals are important to make sure that kami stays as a positive power for its surroundings. Living right next to each other in the same world, the line between humans and kami was ambiguous. (Hondru 2014: 48; Nelson 2003: 158-159; Ohnuki-Tierney 1987: 29; Porrasmaa 2013: 207; Servomaan, 2007: 53; Vesterinen 1987: 156, 161). Despite being one of the most advanced nations in the world, spiritual beliefs and customs are still strong in Japan (Hondru 2014: 47). While walking with an informant, I noticed an elderly lady praying in front of a small stone statue that was in a miniature temple on the side of the road. There were even some mandarins as offerings. When I asked about the statue, I was explained that the statue was protecting the travelling children. Then I asked did she also pray. “Now and then,” she replied. “But always when I’m with my grandmother.”

“...there is a widespread belief that the Japanese have an inherent affinity with nature and that this affinity is one of the major characteristics of Japanese culture” (Shirane 2012: 5). Traditionally nature is not seen as a threat in Japanese thinking. For centuries it has been a common believe that the Japanese live in harmony with the nature, being or desiring to be one with it, unlike the Westerns who try to conquer the nature. This has been promoted in various media in Japan, even in school textbooks e.g. Japanese Literature: Fusion with Nature. Only recently there has been researchers who show skepticism towards this way of thinking. (Evåsoja 2008:29; Shirane 2012: 5). Nature is also the foundation of Japanese literary and visual culture. Nature, and through it the national character since the Heian period, were seen to harmonious, as living harmoniously with the nature was seen as part of the national identity. As so, nature was presented how it should be, not as what it is. The inner character of nature outweighs indicating the outward appearance of things in the environment. (Servomaan 2007: 89-90; Shirane 2012: 8). Although the traditional arts rely heavily on the elements from nature, nature is also present in many aspects of daily life. Natural materials are central in traditional Japanese architecture, colors names (peach color (momo-iro), cherry blossom color (sakura-iro), Japanese rose color (yamabuki-iro) etc.) and seasonal marketing are just a few of countless ways nature exist in Japanese mundane life. (Shirane 2012). This “living harmoniously with nature” also includes flowers. Although Japanese acknowledge that many Western countries love flowers, for example England is famous for its gardening, they don’t live with them. Instead, Westerners look flowers, while Asians live with flowers (Kurita 2001: 7).

The Soto-Uchi Dichotomy
An individual locates themselves in society by situationally changing social position, soto-uchi system. The dichotomy of uchi-soto is one of the cornerstones of Japan’s society that guides people’s everyday behavior when interacting with others. It is the basis of all relationships. Depending on the context, uchi and soto can have several meanings: Uchi (内) might refer to 1. Inside 2. Indoors 3. Inside group 4. My/our house, whereas soto (外) means opposite, 1. Outside 2. Outdoors 3. Outside group 4. Outside house. (Davies & Ikeno 2002: 217; Lebra 1976: 112).

These relationships defined by the dichotomy are not static but dynamic, always changing. The location and the current social group affects how the behavior towards the same person changes. Situation dependent, dynamics change frequently. Let’s use a Japanese company as an example. Inside the company, coworkers belong to uchi group, to which boss does not belong. Boss is person of soto, and therefore is treated with more respect and distantly inside the company. However, when interacting with a client or rival company, the boss becomes a part of the uchi. As mentioned before, this kind of system or behavior is not unique to Japan, but it is held in higher regard and the rules controlling people’s behavior are more strictly defined than in many other cultures.

As many things in Japanese culture are, uchi-soto dichotomy is multilayered. As people belong to different uchi groups at the same time, there is an order of significance among the groups. In the center of all, is oneself. Next is a family, the very first uchi group of every Japanese and the most important. Next are friends and colleagues, then bosses, clients and so on. The order may change depending on the individual and what they hold most close to themselves. But the strangers are always the furthest group, soto, from oneself. To foreigners it is impossible to become a part of uchi, they are always considered to be soto. This is the wall that is impenetrable to anyone but Japanese. This also explains why Japanese people are extremely polite towards foreigners.

This type of system is by no means unique to Japan. In every culture there is some form of system that helps people to position themselves in society, dividing people to us and others. But in Japan, people are very sensitive to uchi-soto dichotomy, time altering their behavior accordingly. (Lebra 1976: 112-113). What I believe to distinct uchi-soto system from other similar ones, is the treatment of outsiders. People of soto are treated extremely politely and showing them one’s true feelings is minimalized. Inside the group, people usually have another uchi-soto system, kouhai and senpai.

Uchi is a tight unit that people heavily rely on to. Belonging to uchi group gives certain level of security, giving them a stable position and clear instructions how they should behave in any given situation. Starting from elementary school, children are taught to organize people around them hierarchically and place themselves in the said hierarchy (Hendry 1993: 125). Japanese relationships have a strongly fixed social structure, a seniority-based hierarchy, where it’s important to be aware of one’s own position in the organization and act accordingly. This is especially case in a senpai-kouhai relationship. (Benedict 1954:220; Karvinen 2014: 164). In a seniority-based hierarchy newcomers are on the lowest level of the hierarchy and the most
Senior member is on the top. This system is valid in all institutional organizations from clubs and school to business. Kouhai (後輩) stands for a junior and senpai (先輩) for a senior. It is easy to perceive the relative position of the person in a group from their behavior and language. Kouhai is expected to revere their senpai and act on senpai’s instructions. Kouhai will also use keigo, the most formal and respecting form of speech, when addressing their senpai. (Hendry 1993:125, 143). At first, it may seem as kouhai has got the short end of the stick but the relationship is not a one-sided. Senpai is obligated to take care and train their kouhai. If a kouhai by a chance makes a mistake, senpai takes the responsibility. (Benedict 1954: 220; Karvinen 2014: 164-165). Senpai is also kouhai’s contact person to the people with higher authority. In Japanese company building, the floors are hierarchically arranged so that the lowest ranking employees are closer to the ground floor and the status rises according the floor, the employees “protecting” the top. The interaction with the boss is done indirectly. The customer first takes contact to the employee, who then takes it to the supervisor. If supervisor is unable to make decision, he contacts his supervisor and so on, till the top. (Hendry 1993: 124).

Soto and uchi dichotomy can also be used when talking of spatial dimensions. When speaking of uchi-soto dichotomy in spatial meaning, it doesn’t much changes from its social dimension. When speaking of uchi-soto in spatial sense, uchi means a place that belongs to someone, not a public place. For example, a friend’s house is the friend’s uchi, their space. Meanwhile, a train station is a public space, making it soto space. To sum it up, uchi is a space that has been claimed by someone, individual or group, to be their space. Like with the social dimension of the dichotomy, this also affects to people’s behavior. Uchi is held in high importance by those who it belongs to, therefore it is treated with respect. One form of showing this respect is taking off shoes when entering uchi. Japanese take their shoes off when entering in someone’s house but not when they walk in to a train station.
4 History of Cherry Blossoms in Japan

As cherry blossom is a native flower, and tree, in Japan, it has been a part of Japanese symbolism before written records (Katsuki 2015: 2). With history as long as cherry blossom, it is difficult to speak how meaningful symbol cherry blossom is to the Japanese culture and how many underlying meanings it holds without putting it into a historical context. There are many ways to see and understand cherry blossoms (Iwatsuki 2013: 150, 161).

Ancient Japan

The oldest historical documents in Japan, Kojiki (712) and Nihon shoki (720), also called Nihongi, are important sources of information about the classical Japanese history, its people and their connection to supernatural (Vesterinen 1987: 13). They are a mix of myth and actual historical documents, starting from the Japan’s creation myths and gods, continuing to the rulers and their reigns till 8th century. One of these mythical stories is the story of Emperor’s godly origins where cherry blossoms play a significant role. The story goes that the grandson of Amaterasu, the goddess of sun, Ninigi-no-Mikoto went to meet the god called Ōyamazumi, the god of mountains, for a daughter for marriage. This, however, offered two daughters: Konohana-no-Sakuya-Hime, the spirit of cherry blossoms, and Iwa-Nabi-Hime, the spirit of rock. Ninigi-no-Mikoto fell in love with beautiful Konohana-no-Sakuya-Hime and returned less attractive Iwa-Nabi-Hime to her father. Ōyamazumi begged him to consider as the younger sister was indeed beautiful but short-lived. If Ninigi-no-Mikoto would only take the younger sister, his life would be short like the blossoms. In the contrast, marrying the elder sister would ensure longevity. Ninigi-no-Mikoto still refused, becoming a mortal. As Ninigi-no-Mikoto was a great-grandfather of Emperor Jimmu, Japan’s first Emperor, the story explains why the royal family is not immortal despite their godly origins. (Iwatsuki 2013: 163; Kurita 2001: 9; Moriya 2013: 61-62; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 28; Tanaka 2003: 21-22).

Nara Period (710-794)

The Chinese court had a strong influence to the Japanese court before and during the Nara period, Japan sending official envoys to China since 630. Similarly, hanami first arrived to Japan’s court from China in the Nara Era. At this time period, hanami was called hana no utage, and the flower admired was exclusively a plum blossom. In China, plums enjoyed similar status as cherries in Japan (Goody 1993: 364; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 54; Porrasmaa 2013: 238; Shirahata 2015: 18-19; Takagi 1996: 39). Most of the survived historical documents from this period focus on hana no utage practiced by nobles, but there are written accounts describing commoner’s hanami, e.g. a record, Hitachi no Kuni Fudoki, from year 713. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 33).

Although not clear when it actually started, the common folk had their own version of hanami, a practice called “entering to a spring mountain” (haruyamairi 春山入り).
It was believed that every spring Yama-no-Kami, the god of mountain, descended from the mountains and became Ta-no-Kami, the god of rice paddies, taking a residence inside cherry trees, blossoms being the sign of the god’s arrival. As cherries were at the time exclusively mountain cherries (yamazakura), their association to mountains was natural. Through this association where this god became the god of rice paddies at the spring, rice and cherry blossoms were closely connected. People gathered under the blossoms for the rites to bring god and humans closer to each other. They drank rice wine, sacred wine made from the deity’s body (rice), together with the god, praying for a good harvest and enjoyed of spring scenery. Mountains and rice being sacred, cherry blossoms were also considered sacred. (Mizuhara 2014: 17; Moilanen 2013: 38; Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 214; Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002: 29–30; Porrasmaa 2013: 238; Satou 2014: i; Shirahata 2015).

There is also a third practice involving cherry blossoms. In temples, shrines, and the imperial court, occurred an annual ritual called hana-e-shiki. Although changed with the time, this ritual had three purposes: to chase the evil spirits by the flowers’ power; to pray for a good crop; and for petals to last longer. In some places hana-e-shiki is still held annually to celebrate spring’s arrival. (Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 215; Ohnuki-Tierney, 2002: 29).

**Heian Period (794-1185)**

After Nara, the capital was shifted to Heian-Kyō (now Kyoto). These two capitals are often spoken as a place where the “real” Japan can be found, as both have acted as capitals at one point, centers where the traditional Japanese culture is thought to have begun and evolve. (Vesterinen 1987: 70).

The nationalism rose for a first time in Japan during Heian Period when Japanese elite began to make a distinction between Chinese and their own culture. The official envoys were discontinued starting from 894 and the Japanese aristocrats and intellectuals started to look for a symbolism that would characterize their own culture and cherry blossoms was turned into the key symbol of Japanese culture. As a result, the plum blossom as a motif was replaced by a cherry blossom. This included the plum tree at the Imperial palace to be switched into a cherry tree. (Katsuki 2015: 3-5; Kurita 2001: 7-8; Moriya 2013: 61; Tanaka 2003: 25-26). China continued to be influential among the elite but “…there was no question that they began locating their own distinct identity, for which they chose cherry blossoms as their major metaphor.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 54-55). Japanese started to call their country, Yamato (The Great Harmony 大和), in order to emphasize the newly found national character that was associated to a harmony with nature. Along with the national identity, all art forms of the culture started to develop into their own direction.

Heian period was a time when arts and crafts flourished in the court. (Shirane 2012: 8). The political elite, along with imperial family, developed the aesthetics of the cherry blossom to display their cultural sophistication and political power (Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 214). The first annual imperial cherry blossom viewing called hana no en, the feast of the flower, was held in 812 and continued till the 1930s. Often
portrayed in arts and literature, this event was seen to represent the court’s elegant high culture. (Porrasmaa 2013: 238; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 53).

**Nanboku-chō Period (1334-1392)**

Rising to the same hierarchical category with aristocrats by the 12th century, the upper-class warriors (samurai) established a term called bunburyoudou (文武両道). This meant a warrior should be “accomplished in both literary and military arts”. Now that the warlords were in the same circles with the aristocrats, it was not enough that they were accomplished swordsmen and military tacticians. They had to cultivate “culture”, have intelligence to compose poems, ability play instruments, be familiar with both Chinese and Japanese literature etc. Hanami was an excellent chance for warriors to show how cultured and sophisticated they were, as the important part of hanami was to show ones cultural skills. The main event of hanami was composing and reading poems for the praise of cherry blossoms. Showing ones cultural skill was also an expression of one’s political power and wealth. (Kitakage 2012; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 34; Takagi 1996: 42).

**Sengoku Period (1467-1603)**

Till the end of Sengoku Period, the feudal Japan was divided in several domains, each ruled by its own warlord. The Emperor was recognized as the unquestionable ruler of whole Japan by all lords but his role was basically ceremonial and religious, the real power been in the hands of shogun, the military leader with an absolute power. Shogun’s power, however, had weakened with the time, the real power shifting to the warlords. Many of these lords dreamed of the unification of the Japan, starting an era of Warring States (sengoku jidai 戦国時代), that lasted from 1467 Ōnin War and till 1600 Battle of Sekigahara. There was a short period of peace in the middle of it, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) acted as a de-facto leader of Japan. (Kitakage 2012: 68-85).

The turbulent times affected to the emotions linked to cherry blossoms. It was during this time, when warriors started to compare their own lives to the cherry blossoms and put their own idealism on them, concluding that “people should live beautifully, and die beautifully like the cherry blossoms”. The cherry blossoms were the warrior class’ ideal way of living, as they themselves didn’t know would they be able to see the next they. The warriors should live their lives boldly and purely like cherry blossoms without the fear of death, in order to not to bring shame to their name. (Kitakage 2012: 28, 73-74; McClellan 2005: 10). This time period affected not only the warriors’ and nobility’s image of cherry blossom, but the commoners’ as well. Living in the middle of constant war, people came to realize how fragile life is. This woke a feeling called mujōkan (see Chapter 6.1), strong realization that there is nothing permanent in this world. These feelings were transferred to many nature’s phenomena, mostly to cherry blossom. (Tanaka 2003: 31-32).

Two of the most famous and grandest hanami of all time were the ones held by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The first one, with 5000 guest, was held at Yoshino in 1594 and
the second, even more impressive one, at Daigo Temple in 1598 to show off not only his power and wealth but sophistication he was as well. After all, hanami was an event where people could show their talents in arts, especially poetry was an essential part of hanami. (Kitakage 2012: 72, 75; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 34).

**Edo Period (1603-1868)**

When Tokugawa clan rose to the power at 1603, the long period of war ended. Came the time of peace, along with the isolation over 250 years. The isolation and unquestionable status of Tokugawa clan as de-facto leader of Japan, the country was finally stable. This allowed the science and arts to develop in their own unique direction without outside influence. (Iwatsuki 2013: 170-171; Vesterinen 1987).

Edo period was golden time for cherry blossoms. Several new cherry tree species were cultivated and through the whole period shoguns ordered cherry trees to be planted, prompting lords in different domain to gift cherry trees from their own domains. Cherry trees were planted to temples, school and castle yards, at riverbanks etc. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 55). The reasons, however, weren’t just because of their aesthetic qualities but also had practical reasons (Goody 1993: 28). For example, there are practical reasons why cherry trees were planted at a riverbanks, apart from aesthetic ones. The first reason was that cherry trees’ leaves and flowers were believed had an antitoxic qualities, which would purify the water. For this reason, cherry blossoms are often found close to water. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 55.) Second reason is more complex. To prevent flooding and to create waterway for goods and people, rivers were made in important cities. After the waterway was build, the ground on the sides were weak. Cherry trees were then planted to river banks and people were invited to have hanami. People would then stomp on recently shoveled ground, effectively strengthening it. Nowadays, cherry trees growing next to water attract people to admire trees’ beauty and for these people there are different kind of attractions offered, including rentable boats and cruises. (Hayashi Osamu no ima deshou! kouza. 12.4.2016).

The common people’s hanami also came to its highpoint at the Edo period. The numerous paintings depicting commoner’s leisure time show to people today how commoners celebrated hanami in temples, shrines and other famous cherry blossoms spots. Sometimes, even nobility took part, though behind bamboo curtains, hidden from the commoners’ eyes. The capital Edo (Tokyo) started to have hanami as a major annual event, which was modeled after the nobility’s hanami to include composition of poems, feasting and masquerades. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 34-35).

**From Meiji period (1869-1912) till II World War**

After Japan ended its longtime isolation, the westernizing of Japan began. Tokugawa clan lost its power and the power was given to the Emperor and his new, western-styled government. After being isolated for approx. 250 years, Japan had to start to look its place and national identity in the world. And once again, the cherry blossom was placed as a symbol of the traditional Japan. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 292).
In 1912, Japan made its first national gift to U.S.A by sending 3020 cherry trees to Washington, which were planted at the Potomac Park and around the Tidal Basin. Since 1934, there has been held the annual National Cherry Blossom Festival, with parades and beauty pageant. Nowadays it also includes exhibition of traditional Japanese arts, like tea ceremony, and Sakura Matsuri —event where people can experience Japanese culture through traditional food and activities. During the war years the Festival was left suspended and continued after the war, starting from 1946. The Festival still continues to be held every spring in Washington. (McClellan 2005; Moriya 2013: 60-61; Tanaka 2003: 72-77).

At the time Japan opened its borders from isolation, many countries practiced imperialism. Japan also followed this, participating to the World War II. During this time, the symbolism of cherry blossom was altered for military purposes by politics for the first time. The government purposely changed the cherry blossom symbolism from cultural nationalism to the political nationalism for propaganda use. The symbolism implemented to cherry blossoms can be divided to three parts (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 103):

1. Cherry blossoms as the yamato damashii (Japanese spirit)
2. Cherry blossoms as Japanese soldiers
3. Falling cherry blossoms as fallen soldiers

Cherry blossoms at their bloom were a metaphor of yamato damashii (the Japanese spirit) which included all morals, ideals and values that the Japanese revered. The soldiers were seen as an embodiment of the Japanese spirit, proofed by their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the Emperor and the nation. The virtue of cherry blossoms compared to other flowers was stressed to be in a way they “did not cling to their blooming”. This was actively used “to convince soldiers to plunge into death”. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 106-107). As cherry blossoms had been used as symbol by warrior class during the Sengoku period’s turbulent era, along with its II World War use, cherry blossoms have an image of war closely associated in them (Iwatsuki 2013: 159; Kitakage 2012).

There were countless ways how cherry blossoms were used for propaganda: well-known poems were taken for a propaganda use to promote the Japanese spirit and thus willing sacrifice, like the Motoori Norinaga’s poem (see Chapter 1) which was originally meant to praise blossoms as a celebration of life; in their letters and poems, the young suicide pilots compared themselves to falling petals; at home, loved ones planted cherry trees for the memories of the dead; and while warring in the foreign land, the Japanese soldiers planted cherry trees, as in their minds eventually these lands would be a part of Japan and there had to be cherry blossoms in Japan. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 106, 122, 184).

The propaganda was most apparent in the countless nationalistic songs where the Emperor, soldiers and the country were praised through cherry blossom symbolism.
These songs were sang at schools and the propaganda was thus instilled to the young minds from the early age. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 122). After the war, use of cherry blossoms in songs was a taboo for a while.

The tokkōtai (特攻隊), also known as kamikaze/suicide pilots, were made into epitomes of “falling cherry blossom” symbolism. By the use of cherry blossoms, the pilots’ operation was aestheticized to something noble and beautiful. Planes had pictures of cherry blossoms on them and the corps, planes and bombs were named after the cherry blossoms. In other words, “...the aesthetics of cherry blossoms was objectified in the names and designs of the tokkōtai corps and planes, thereby aestheticizing the operation and its ideological basis...” (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 163-165). There were Mountain cherry blossoms corps, Young cherry blossoms corps, etc. The military fully exploited the cherry blossom for the pilots.

To the pilots, cherry blossoms were extremely controversial symbols. Firstly, it represented their youth, the pilots’ ages ranging from 18 to 24, the spring of their lives full of beauty. Then, it came to represent their early death, shortness of their lives, metaphors for themselves. “...cherry blossoms became the mirror upholding the purity of an individual who keeps his integrity against the worldly desire for acclaim, acting as a counterpart to the war-frenzied Japanese society.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 210). In their letters and poems, the young pilots compared themselves to falling petals. At home, loved ones planted cherry trees for the memories of the dead (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 184).
5 Comprehensive Guide to Hanami

The fact that the cherry blossom is a special flower to Japanese becomes apparent every year at spring, when people in large quantities gather to admire the blooming and the society becomes filled with cherry blossom themed items and decorations (Katsuki 2015: i). The word hanami (花見) is composed of two word, hana (花) and mi (見). As hana means flower and mi to look/watch/see, hanami means literally a “flower viewing”. But although hana by itself can mean any flower from orchid to dandelion, when used in hanami the meaning of hana changes to signify only cherry blossom. Accordingly, hanami is exclusively used only about cherry blossoms. While Japanese also love to view lavender and sunflower fields, these are not called hanami.

Flower viewing isn’t completely unique to Japan. Netherland’s tulips or France’s lavender fields are both quite famous. The hanami itself originates from China. In China, the flower viewing was a leisure activity of royalty and never spread widely among the commoners as it has done in Japan. Along with the path of history hanami has become a significant part of Japan both culturally and socially. The practice has largely disappeared from China but is still loyally practiced in Japan. According to Chinese exchange students studying in Japan, there are still some places famous of their flowers in China which attract people to visit and admire flowers, but claims this “can’t be compared to Japanese hanami tradition”. The scale that cherry blossoms are admired clearly shows the Japanese attachment to cherry blossoms.

The way how flowers are admired also differs from other countries, as in other countries it is usually directed towards tourists while hanami is aimed to and practiced by locals. As an annual event hanami also has other purposes than viewing the flowers. Being an event that marks the start of spring hanami reminds me of the Finnish juhannus. Hanami celebrates the arrival of spring whereas juhannus celebrates a midsummer. In hanami, the dominant symbol is cherry blossom, whereas in juhannus it is a midnight sun. And very much in similar way to juhannus, hanami is also treated nowadays as a chance to gather together with people to relax and celebrate, usually with alcohol. For the centuries people in Japan have gathered under the cherry blossoms to recite poems and even today the large masses around the country gather to admire the bloom of the flowers, although the poems have been dropped out of this tradition. (Chamberlain 1979: 89).
The first thing informing of the approaching hanami season, is sakura zensen (Picture 7), the cherry blossom front line, which the news, newspapers and online-sites start to show at the beginning of February since Showa 26 (1951) (Tanaka 2003: 14). Sakura zensen is a weather prediction providing the estimated timetable of cherry blossoms blooming. It shows blooming from region to region from the first flowers to the mankai (full-bloom, over 80% of flowers open). Sakura zensen is shown at the end of every news broadcast and after the blooming starts, news include footages of cherry blossoms and people celebrating hanami from different prefecture. This way everyone gets real time information which regions are currently blooming and can plan for their own hanami. Mass media plays big part in the excitement surrounding the blooming (Tanaka 2003: 16).

5.1 The Way of Hanami, Three Hanami Categories

In his book Hanami to sakura (Flower viewing and Cherry blossom, 2015), Shirahata defines Japanese hanami by three traits: (1) large group of cherry blossoms, meaning that hanami should locate at a place with many blooming cherry trees; (2) drinking and eating, apart from flower viewing the event should include these; (3) crowd/community, there should be more than two persons included. These attributes, according to Shirahata, define Japanese flower viewing differentiating hanami from other kind of flower viewings, example Holland’s tulip tours, thus concluding “the uniqueness of hanami”. However, I find that the attributes Shirahata claims to define the Japanese hanami are insufficient, and I’m not alone (Tanaka 2003: 19). Although this certainly is the traditional hanami, my observations and interviews showed that there is more diversity in ways of hanami today. During the fieldwork, I noticed how
to many seeing the flowers while traveling to work, looking at the cherry trees on a school yard or sitting alone under a cherry tree on a yard sufficed as hanami. However, when people start to talk about hanami, the first image they usually think is the one described by Shirahata.

Based on my observations and interviews, I have limited hanami to mean cases where viewing the flowers is the main objective, not a byproduct. According to this definition I have categorized hanamis to the three main categories. The first category is the traditional hanami (Picture 8), which is celebrated by a picnic. This is the one that Shirahata is describing. Second category, Sakura Matsuri, or Cherry Blossom Festival, is the type of hanami where people participate to a festival celebrating the cherry blossoms. Matsuri means a festival that has its roots in Shinto. And lastly, the mobile viewing. By this I refer to hanami where people admire cherry blossoms while on to move. This type of hanami has most diversity in the ways it’s held and is often commercialized form of hanami. This includes sightseeing tours, photographing, or strolling in a park.

**The Traditional Hanami**

When the word hanami is mentioned, this is the one that first comes to mind, also being the type of hanami that Shirahata is referring to. Although I’ve named it traditional here, it is still relatively new form of hanami, from 18th century (Tanaka 2003: 60-63). This type of hanami is held in a form of picnic, where a group gathers under the cherry blossoms to socialize while drinking and eating. There are many kind of groups that enjoy the traditional hanami, main group types being either a group of university students, or a group of coworkers from the same company. Often families and friends also celebrate this type of hanami. While Shirahata’s definition for the traditional hanami is mostly accurate, some points are contradicted by the
information gathered through interviews. Whereas Shirahata claims that there must be more than one tree and more than two person in hanami, three informants also included to hanami description “a one person sitting on a porch watching a cherry tree in their own yard”. When asked to specify the requirements for hanami, it was commonly seen that an absolute was the presence of cherry blossoms, without them it would be just a picnic.

My first hanami experience was the traditional one. It happened during my exchange year in Japan while I was traveling across the country during a spring break. I was invited to hanami by a friend at a theme park in Ueno in April 2012. Ueno is an area in Tokyo, famous of Ueno Park. It is well-known of its cherry blossoms, being arguably the most popular spot for hanami in Tokyo. Before and since then, I have walked through the park several times during mankai, the full-bloom. It is an impressive scenery. The group consisted of friends who had annually had hanami since high school, all of them being 25 years old at the time of this particular hanami. They still continue this tradition. Since our hanami the group has gotten larger, as some have married and have children. Or, like in my case, some bring other friends to participate.
At the time of our arrival, our group had already found a place and reserved it. Reserving a place for hanami is called *bashotori*, literally meaning *place taking* (Picture 9). Usually picnic-styled hanami happens sitting on a blue sheet placed on the ground. When a person responsible of bashotori finds a satisfying spot, they set this blue sheet on the spot. This way it also works as a mark for bashotori to show that the place is already taken. This is why the famous hanami spots are often covered by blue sheets. Next to blue sheet are lined up the shoes of participants, as it’s a taboo to step on the blue sheet while wearing shoes. While celebrating Vappu picnic in Finland, I noticed that many leave their shoes on, some claiming the weather to be too cold for taking the shoes off. In Japan, blue sheet is uchi space, an indoor space, and it is required to take shoes off at entrance.

In our case, some of our group had managed to reserve table by early arrival (Picture 10). Knowing the popularity of Ueno, this was enough to be considered as a small miracle. After introductions, we sat down to drink, eat and converse, occasionally commenting cherry blossoms beauty. After the food and drinks prepared in advance were consumed, others started to play rock-paper-scissors. I was told that they were deciding which two would go to buy more food and beverages. When I offered to participate I was told, “No, no, you’re the guest. Don’t worry about those things.” Two of the guys lost and went to a convenience store. It took a while before they returned, bringing enough consumables for everyone. Apparently there had been a long line in the store, which didn’t surprise anyone. During the cherry blossom season Ueno is always full of people, it is one of the most popular viewing spot in Tokyo. Although the roads in Ueno are packed even during the daytime, the park really becomes alive at the nighttime. This is because Ueno is traditionally used as hanami location by many companies. After the workhours, the employees assemble to the park to have the company’s official hanami, usually held annually.
After we had eaten and drank enough, we left the theme park and started slowly heading towards station. We purposely chose the station further away, in order to enjoy the blossoms and the merry atmosphere for a bit longer. While strolling through the park, we took many pictures, fooling around a bit. At one point, we noticed one person missing. Looking behind we spotted him talking with a drunk salaryman. The salaryman gave him two cans of beer, our friend politely accepting them by bowing slightly. When I asked what that was all about, he laughed that the salaryman’s company had some leftover beers that they gave to random passerby. “Does that happen often?” I asked, and he answered, “Sometimes.” The atmosphere is very cheerful during the hanami season and being drunk at the nighttime is one part of the experience. The group then decided the fate of two beers with a game of rock-paper-scissors. When arriving to the station, we followed the Japanese custom and formed a ring to thank everyone for the evening and say the parting words. This is done after every gathering and indicates the conclusion of the gathering. Some people might still go to nijikai (二次会), afterparty, after this, and during this parting process it is usually decided who stay and who leave “early”. Nijikai usually involves going to izakaya or karaoke and is entirely voluntary.

There is a great difference between the hanami held at night and the hanami held during the day. The account written above describes the night hanami and is held by adults, especially university students and working people. This naturally means that great amounts of alcohol is consumed and, as result, the atmosphere is quite jovial. Daytime is the time when families, housewives and high schoolers go to picnic to enjoy of the cherry blossoms. Because of this, the atmosphere is much calmer and consume of alcohol is kept moderate. Instead, many prefer to drink juice or tea.

“During a day there really aren’t so many who seriously look at them. Except at the beginning! At the beginning they look.” (J1W26).

It is said that cherry blossoms are at their most beautiful during the night time. Yozakura, 夜桜 (night cherry blossoms), refers to cherry blossoms viewed at the hours of darkness (Picture 11). It is often said that cherry blossoms are at their most beautiful during the nighttime. With yozakura, it is crucial to have some kind of light, the reason why the popular hanami spots usually have several spotlights in order for cherry blossoms to be observable even at night. “If there isn’t any light up, you really can’t see a thing! I didn’t see a thing…” (J3M21). During the light up, people tend to truly concentrate to the cherry blossoms while during the day the food is the main attraction. The downside is that it is difficult to catch the beauty of yozakura by camera.

“Yozakura are, like during the night cherry blossoms have spotlights, and I think it’s this time, when people seriously look at the blossoms. (...) Cherry blossoms are pretty white, so when the light reflects to them, the cherry blossoms themselves seem like they are glowing.” (J1W26).
Sakura Matsuri (Cherry Blossom Festival)

Matsuri is an annual shinto festival, meant to bring a local god and people closer to each other. There are vast amount of different matsuri in Japan, it being a common saying in Japan that every day there is matsuri happening somewhere. Kunio Yanagita (1956) claimed that understanding religions in Japan is almost impossible without getting to know the matsuri culture. Matsuri as an event acts as a repayment for the deity. Deity is invited to celebrate along with the people whom wish to express their gratitude and pacify the deity to ensure the cooperation with it. (Kurita 2001: 9; Nelson 2003: 160; Vesterinen 1987: 201, 203; Yamanobe & Yaegashi 2010: 223). Matsuri are loosely structured and highly-local, every area having their own matsuri. They are held not only for religious purposes, but for the community’s unity and vitality. Through nostalgia people often have emotional connection to matsuri, both individually and collectively, and consequently, Matsuri are enforcing and embodying the identity of the community. Since the Meiji period, the entertainment side of matsuri has become more prominent compared to religious side. Matsuri are originally meant for local community, although nowadays they are also used as tourist attractions. Gion Matsuri in Kyoto, Nebuta Matsuri in Aomori, Awa-odori Matsuri in Tokushima are famous all across Japan, covered by many news. (Nelson 2003: 158-162; Yamanobe & Yaegashi 2010: 223).
Acting as a break from everyday life, matsuri brings a sense of seasonality to the annual rhythm (Yamanobe & Yaegashi 2010: 223). This is especially true with hanami, the celebration of spring, where the cherry blossoms acts as the main symbol of spring in Japan. Compared to other matsuri, Sakura Matsuri (桜祭り), Cherry Blossom Festival, there are some drastic differences. Sakura matsuri is held all across the country but at different times and with their own quirks. Perhaps the most noticeable different to other matsuri is the lack of mikoshi. Usually central part of the matsuri is a palanquin, mikoshi, which is carried around the neighborhood. Inside is the deity that matsuri is held for. Usually the object the deity resides in is held inside the temple and only seen by monks. (Nelson 2003: 160). However, in Sakura Matsuri there is no mikoshi. This comes from the fact that god is already present, residing in the blossoms. Another remarkable difference is that Sakura Matsuri are held all across the country, not just at one location. Although the festival is held mainly for locals’ enjoyment, some towns try to attract tourists to visit their matsuri. Because everyone can enjoy hanami and Sakura Matsuri at their own hometown, Sakura Matsuri needs some specialty in order to attract tourists from other regions. For example, Hirosaki’s Sakura Matsuri is famous for its moat. The whole moat is surrounded by cherry trees from both sides, which during the peak blooming season create a beautiful and rare scenery. Not only are the trees creating pink walls on the sides of the moat, but falling petals float on the water, forming a pink carpet on the

**Picture 12. Lanterns**
water. During the peak season, the hotels are fully booked months advance. Himeji, on the other hand, is famous for its castle, Himeji castle, which is said to be one of the most beautiful castles in Japan. The castle is surrounded by park filled with cherry trees. It is said that the beauty of the white castle is at its most beautiful when cherry blossoms are at their full-bloom. Then there is Okazaki castle’s matsuri. Okazaki castle is the birthplace of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun and perhaps the most famous person in Japan’s history. This historical side is also present in Okazaki’s Sakura Matsuri.

In Nagoya 2016, there were several posters all around the town promoting Okazaki castle’s Sakura Matsuri (Picture 13). I took one of the pamphlets next to a poster. The pamphlet informed the time, place and program of the event. These pamphlets are also distributed to the locals’ home, the main target of the festival. Festival sites are quite easy to find. From station begins a line of lanterns leading straight to the festival site (Picture 12). On these lanterns, usually words SAKURA MATSURI and the name of the location is written, for example Hirosaki or Ueno. Some lanterns have sponsors’ names on them. Usually castle grounds, parks or even temples act as festival sites, at a place famous of its cherry blossoms.

What makes matsuri different from other cherry blossom viewings, are the countless stalls, yatai (Picture 14). Yatai is a small stand, usually a food stall but there are also
different types of carnival games where people can win small prizes. A popular yatai, aside from food, is *kingyo sukui*, goldfish scooping (Picture 15), where the idea is to

![Picture 14. Line of Yatai](Image14.jpg)

![Picture 15. Kingyo sukui](Image15.jpg)
catch goldfishes using a small paper net. The goldfish can be kept as a pet. Food sold at yatai are fresh, made on the spot in front of the customers. Students usually avoid using yatai, even when going to matsuri, as they are quite expensive. Sakura matsuri are events that locate places filled with cherry blossoms, so they are excellent places to enjoy traditional hanami. If there is not enough food, it’s quick and easy to pick-up something from yatai. These places are in high demand, so bashotori is a must.

Compared to other types of hanami, Sakura Matsuri have other attractions apart from flowers. There might be a parade, or there might be a music, a dance or a comedy show. If there is a river close by, rentable boats are offered. The way how matsuri proceeds depends a lot on location and the local traditions and history. This is what attracts tourists to arrive at specific matsuri, specialties that are not available anywhere else. Himeji and Kyoto promote beauty of their surroundings, while Okazaki’s Sakura Matsuri uses its history as Tokugawa Ieyasu’s birthplace, showing re-enactments of history, marketing special goods etc. “but…viewing the flowers is still the main.” (J4W21).

The festival site at Hirosaki Park is the biggest Sakura Matsuri I’ve ever seen. The line of yatai spread to all corners of the large park. There were some yatai I had never seen before, like scare house and 4D-attraction. While strolling around the area, sky got darker and darker. At the same time, festival became merrier and merrier. As the school and work hours were over, more people kept joining the matsuri. After
eating some fried chicken (Picture 17), I decided to buy a chocolate banana (Picture 18) as a dessert. These can be found in almost any matsuri and as I found the yatai, for my surprise they had an offer: two for the price of one, if you win a rock-paper-scissors three times in a row. I won and gave the second one to a friend. After that, we tried few carnival stall type of yatai. There was a shooting game, a lottery type of game and many others. Unfortunately, none of us won any of the main prizes, only getting pens and notebooks.

Picture 17. (up) & 18. (down) Matsuri Food
The Mobile Hanami

By *mobile hanami* I mean hanami occurring while on the move. Usually hanami means sitting down and socializing with people close to oneself while consuming food and drinks. This section consist of occasions where hanami is had while proceeding between point A to point B with the purpose to practice cherry blossom viewing, be it a walk around the park or a bus tour to a famous cherry blossom spot. However, there must be a clear intention to view cherry blossoms and it must be the main purpose of the trip. For example, this does not include flower viewings that happen while people are traveling to a work or school, although these cases have also been called hanami in some occasions of daily life. I have decided to exclude them as the fact are they truly hanami or not is debatable and I lack comprehensive data to make conclusive answer. I have divided the mobile hanami to commercial and self-organized sections.

By *commercial*, I refer to a mobile hanami arranged by a company, city or other second-hand party for commercial use. Most common are the guided tours by bus or train. During the cherry blossom season, flyers advertising the cherry blossom viewing tours appear to stations, travel agencies and other public places. Many these locations are unreachable without a car, so these tours are a unique change to visit places by a bus. Some tours might take only a day but three day tours that visit several famous locations are also available. These tours usually consist of housewives and older generation, whom have more time to take these tours compared to those who work or go to school during the days. Younger generation also prefers self-organized trips over commercial ones. Trips to Kyoto, “hana no miyako” (the capital of flowers), are also popular, as there are many famous monuments and sites that are said to be at their best during the cherry blossom season, prompting people to choose this specific time to travel (Iwatsuki 2013: 174).

“There are Japanese tourists... just to see the cherry blossoms. I have met some who have come from Kyuushu to Hokkaido. The most beautiful flowers are at Hirosaki, and when they are in their most utmost beautiful moment there are no hotels available at all, so I’ve heard.” (J11W41).

The participants of tours are almost exclusively Japanese. There are some foreign travel agencies, like Japanican and Japanispesialisti, that offer similar guided tours for foreigners in English but the Japanese market is concentrated on domestic tourism. The tours usually consist of housewives and older generation, whom have more time to take these tours compared to those who work or go to school. Younger generation prefers self-organized trips over commercial ones.

Another form of mobile hanami are cruises on the river, which are popular during the spring time. For example, all the way along with Tokyo’s Sumida River approx. 1000 cherry trees grow magnificently on the riverbanks (Picture 19). Sumida River is famous for its annually held cherry blossom viewing cruises, where people can enjoy riverside cherry blossoms from unique perspective.
Light-ups are very common during cherry blossom season but, apart from the usual ones, there are also light-up events. The usual light-ups are free of charge and natural, usually observed during traditional hanami. The events have artistic taste in them and require to pay for a ticket. As a group of three we went to a light-up event in Fukuoka. The event consisted three different spots. First one was a tower decorated by lanterns with a night view of the city. The second spot was a secluded area with music and lights that changed the colors along with the music. The last spot was open area that had red-shaded light-up. It was possible to buy a ticket only to one spot or all spots. People around us were mostly made of either couples or small groups (3-4 people), as is usual in this type of hanami. There weren’t much children as it was already late, dark enough for the light-up to start.

With commercial hanami there aren’t necessarily real cherry trees blooming on the site. In spring, many different companies, organizations, towns etc. coordinate cherry blossom themed events. In Nagoya, for example, there was an event where an artist had made an artificial “cherry tree” for all five senses on the top of Nagoya tower. There was white fabric shaped as tree and a video of falling petals was projected on the fabric to create an illusion of people standing under a real cherry tree. The room was emitting the scent of cherry blossoms and background music played while people could order drinks in order for people to have hanami experience. This is just
a one type of cherry blossom themed attractions that is offered during the spring season.

By self-organized mobile hanami I mean the type of hanami where all the arrangements are done by individuals themselves. They can include self-arranged travels to famous cherry blossom spots, or just a walking through the park to view cherry blossoms. These trips are usually done with small group of friends or alone. Lately the lone cherry blossom viewings have become more common. According to Huffington Post’s Japanese edition, many feeling that they can truly concentrate on appreciating the flowers’ beauty by being alone, the socializing taken out. According to the research about Aomori’s hanami in spring 2018 conducted by Happy Research center, the act of people having hanami alone has noticeably increased, from 11.6% in 2013 to 17.2% in 2018 (Asahi Group Holdings 28.2.2018). Some even decide to travel independently, and follow the sakura zensen from the south till north. Every year there are new photo catalogues sold in bookshops made by these travelers.

There are tree parks meant especially for people to view the cherry blossoms, many of these using the fact that they have several different cherry tree species as their selling point (Katsuki 2015: 8). One famous spot for viewing is Tokyo’s Shinjuku Gyoen. Shinjuku Gyoen is a large, popular park in the heart of Tokyo. Because of its popularity, the security is tight. When I and my key informant visited Shinjuku Gyoen, I was surprised by a long line leading to the park’s gates. Around us, there were numerous prohibiting signs. No sports like jogging or ball games, no alcohol drinks, no pets, no music, no collecting plants, no bicycles, no advertising or propaganda… When we finally got to the gate, the security staff checked our bags for prohibited substances like alcohol before allowing us to proceed inside. Inside the park, we moved according to free maps offered at the gate, along with the other visitors. Most of the people had their cellphones out, snapping pictures of the different types of cherry blossoms. Usually cherry blossoms at the one area are all same color, but in the park there were many different colors from white to dark pink, right next to each other. While talking of the cherry blossoms, we proceeded to the area where cherry trees were blooming next to water, lakes and small rivers. Although it wasn’t yet the best viewing time, several trees were already blooming. As there are many different type of cherry trees with different blooming times in the park, the blooming period is unusually long. It is almost guaranteed that from March to April a visitor is able to see cherry blossoms blooming.

Some of the most beautiful sceneries of cherry blossoms are only available by car. By this I mean cherry trees that are in line on the side of the road. In spring, these trees form a cherry blossom tunnel, which seem very much like a portal to another world. When I visited Nara, I had chosen a hotel locating on a mountainside. The road leading to hotel was only accessible to cars, so I took a taxi. When I told the hotel’s name, the driver complimented my choice. “You’ve made a good choice,” the driver said repeatedly. “At this time of year, the scenery is amazing. Cherry blossoms are blooming on the roadside while we go up.” These kind of hidden treasures are only available to those who have access to car. One male informant told how he had
driven a road famous for its cherry blossom scenery with his friends, and stopped on to side of the road to admire the landscape and take few pictures.

As proven by examples above, the mobile hanami has various different subcategories. These, however, have one thing in common. Whereas the traditional hanami and the cherry blossom matsuri concentrate on social aspects and/or eating and drinking, the mobile hanami is fully focused on viewing the flowers. Mobile hanami usually includes taking many pictures, while traditional hanami and matsuri are all about having a good time with others, concentrating on to entertaining people accompanying them.

5.2 Lifetime of Hanami

“...cherry blossom viewing is an occasion for the collective activity for each social group within Japanese society.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 38).

It is often said that for travelers it is a difficult task to make it to mankai. Depending on the weather sakura zensen is usually little off and if not reserved early, there are rarely any rooms available in the town. I was lucky to be in Himeji during mankai, when the blossoms were at their best on April 2017. One cloudy day, I was walking towards the Himeji Castle, one of the most beautiful castles in Japan. Inside of the castle had been closed for a public for the sake of restauraion work and it was only couple months since reopening. Partly because most of the visitors lined up to the newly re-opened castle, and partly because it was still a midday, the park surrounding the castle wasn’t crowded as badly as could have been expected. As most of the castles, Himeji Castle also has a park surrounding it. These parks usually
have many cherry blossoms, making them an excellent spots for all different types of hanami.

While walking around the park, I repeatedly stop snatch pictures of the cherry blossoms, with and without the castle, like all other people around me. Japanese love taking pictures and cherry blossoms are a popular target. That is not surprising, the flowers have almost otherworldly charm. While taking pictures, I noticed a person who had positioned three-leg on the side of the road, aiming towards the castle. The spot was perfect, the cherry blossoms being in the just right angle. It isn’t unusual to see people with these during cherry blossom season. There are Japanese that travel after the cherry blossoms, taking pictures of them and make an illustration book. Every year there are many new illustration books. Usually these are purposefully published at the time when people start to prepare for the cherry blossoms, setting people on the mood and inspiring readers to take their own pictures.

The photographer has to stop taking pictures for a moment as a group of tourist sweeps past the spot. The guide speaks loudly to her group, asking them to follow her and not to stop take pictures yet, as they have time for that later. The group hurries towards the castle’s group entrance. While looking after the tourists, I hear a woman’s voice say, “Look at the camera!” Instinctively I turn my head and see a mother bended on her knees, taking pictures of a toddler posing joyfully under the cherry blossoms. “Point at the cherry blossoms,” mother kindly instructs while taking pictures, and the child happily obliges. I start look around me. Close to me, sitting on a blue sheet, there are three teenage girl laughing while eating something from their bento. Behind them, at the clearing, a group of salarymen are having some kind of gathering. After observing surrounds a while, I turn and walk towards the area filled with blooming cherry trees. The whole area overflows from pink blossoms.
“It is truly mankai,” an elderly man walking before me tells his wife besides him. “It truly is,” she answers. They repeat these words few times while strolling forward.

This observation I had in Himeji made me realize how cherry blossoms gather people from all ages and social classes at the same spot. The blooming time of cherry blossoms lands on the period when changes happen to people’s lives, so as an annual event hanami reminds people of these important times during different life stages. In a practical level, hanami is fundamentally a very simple tradition. People gather together under the blooming cherry blossoms to eat, drink and spend time together to celebrate the spring, season of new beginnings. However, hanami holds different social aims depending on the relationships between participants. I have divided hanami to two parts depending on their underlying purposes: the first one is hanami held with family members or friends; the second one is held either in university or with coworkers. During different phases of life, the blossoms hold different meanings to a different person.

**Childhood hanami**

“Because the [child’s] growth happens daily, [parents] really don’t notice how fast it is, but...by going to do the same thing at the same place every year at the same time, ‘last year I had to hold him in my arms but now he is sitting here like this’, in this way. ‘Although he was so small two years ago, now he is running around’, things like that. For this reason, I think the parents take their children to hanami.” (J7W22).

To families, hanami is an annual ritual that helps to realize the passage of time. The main reason for parents to take their children to hanami lies in the fact that the annual blooming of cherry blossoms allows parents to observe and become more deeply aware of their children’s growth, thus helping them to experience the passage of time. Hanami gives a comparison point to
the family, where they can remember the past and then relate to the current situation. This can be further linked to the future, hanami yet to come. Often the very first hanami experience happens with family and/or other relatives. Hanami is a perfect setting to gather relatives together and strengthen the family bonds while keeping the old tradition alive. Small children themselves don’t often care about the blossoms that much, preferring to play and run around.

With family hanami, there are few differences compared to other hanami. As many families have a car, it is possible to them to go more remoted places than usual which also makes it possible to take a family pet to hanami along with a family. Unlike in a city or at popular places. There are even some viewing spots that can’t be reached without a car. What families traditionally eat at a hanami is hanami-bentou. Bentou means a lunchbox of assorted seasonal food. A mother usually prepares homemade bentous to the whole family but they can also be store-bought. Everyone usually has their own box, which makes them popular for small groups, family or friends. In large groups, the food is usually something that can be shared and is therefore ordered in large quantity from stores or restaurants. Also, as families practice hanami at the daytime, alcohol is not consumed. This diverges from the hanami’s usual image, where drinking has a central role. With families, the preferred drink is tea, although small kids might have juice.

Hanami between family and hanami between friends remind each other remarkably, as both are events meant for relaxation and spending time with people important to them. The biggest difference is that in the case of family hanami, it usually stops when children get older and either lack interest to go or move from home. With friends, it’s not unusual that the tradition is continued. The group I had my first hanami with, has celebrated hanami every year together since high school. Their lives have since changed to different directions, some started to work immediately after high school, some continued studying. Still, their tradition is still annually continuing. Along with the time, new people have joined, as members got married, had children etc.

**School hanami**

The cherry blossom season is also the time when new school year starts in Japan, making it a busy season. When a child starts school, hanami is often dropped from the family schedule, although there are also those who continue the tradition. Of my informants, only one, 21, said that their family is still going at the same spot every year to enjoy hanami. After children’s school starts, there is less time for hanami as students have to concentrate on their studies.

“*(I went) with classmates, with everyone. From the start it had been decided that hanami would be on that day, if the weather was good. We had sheet and bentou, so we ate snacks and talked while watching the flowers. Reminds me of the junior high school.*” (J7W22).
Some schools traditionally arrange hanami but there is a great variation among schools. Still, if hanami is school’s tradition, it’s rarely dropped out from the school’s annual activities. Japanese schools also have different variety of afterschool activity clubs, mostly sport clubs, which might have hanami. These afterschool clubs, called *bukatsu*, play a big part in children’s school life starting from junior high. Choosing the club is same as choosing one’s social circle as clubs expect commitment from their members and are time-consuming. One of the informants was in a music club, where they did have hanami. First they gathered for preparations, making riceballs and other food for the event. Then they bought sheet from a shop and headed for the decided spot. As they were a relatively small group, there was no need for bashotori and they found a nice spot quite easily.

"During the high school we really didn’t really have hanami, we just... There were trees lined around the school. So we saw them anyway. Like, when peeking out of the classroom, there were cherry blossoms, that kind of feeling so we really didn’t have any need to go anywhere." (J7W22).

There is almost certainly at least one cherry tree at a schoolyard, even in the middle of urban city. Nobody seemed to know, however, why every school yard has cherry trees. Some suggested that it might be for better pictures. On the first day of school, parents often go under cherry trees to take pictures of their children in their new school uniform. As school usually starts during the blooming period, many are reminded of their school years when they observe cherry blossoms in later years.

### University Hanami

“*Well, I simply think of it as a gathering with friends in club or people from laboratory in April at the beginning of a new semester.*” (J10M23).

The time in university is in Japan often called as *jinsei no natsuyasumi*, the summer vacation of life. Before university, Japanese students are expected to study hard in order to get in the good university, and after university, they enter in the working society where vacations are rare and short. The university is the short time between studying and working that can be used to relax and have fun, therefore being the summer vacation of life.

There are two group type that university students can have their hanami with. One is the laboratory, which consist one faculty’s professor and students. In laboratory, students practice practical skills of their own field under the professor’s supervision, each student having a space to utilize for studying purposes. In Japan, the big part of laboratory work involves helping the professor with their research, students learning while assisting teacher with his project. For this reason, it is important for a teacher to keep a good atmosphere in laboratory, that the work will get done.

“...there really aren’t any homeroom classes in university right? So I joined to a club, University Festival’s Executive Office... (...) There was 120 members.” (J7W22).
The lack of homerooms gives laboratories a high importance as they are the main social channel along with *bukatsu*, afterschool clubs. These afterschool clubs are the second of the two group types. As in junior high and high school, these clubs expect from their members a daily commitment and decide the social circles of student, making it an important decision which club to enter. In clubs, the hierarchy is strict, the first years being the lowest level members and the fourth years the highest level members. Those who’ve already graduated from the club are even higher position. The communication among students is highly influenced by this hierarchy. To students from both group types, hanami acts as a welcome party to a new members of their group.

“There are people graduating from university, and on the other hand there are people entering university, so because it’s like the time to welcoming new people, so let’s just put welcoming party and hanami together...” (J1W26).

The way these two group type practice hanami don’t differ much. The biggest difference between the two is size. Laboratory hanami is usually relatively small, while clubs, especially sport clubs, might easily have couple hundred participant. Also, in case of lab, a professor is often involved. Even if professor is unable to participate to hanami, the beginning of the new semester being usually busy, they usually give a small sum of money to encourage students to have hanami. To
students, hanami is an opportunity have fun while welcoming newcomers to the group. To teacher, hanami is an opportunity create harmony among students.

“But to teacher there seems to be a more political reason. That’s what I thought when discussing with the professor. To the teacher...people in the laboratory are going to be together for a long time and work together, right? It would be difficult if people didn’t get along. So teacher wants to keep the peace by having hanami.” (J2M23).

By celebrating hanami, a common practice familiar to all, the group becomes more whole. Hanami gives students a boost to get know each other in relaxed and fun atmosphere. It is a great benefit for a teacher, who needs students to work together for the next few years, to have group become closer with each other.

In university hanami, amongst the students of the group a leader is chosen to organize the event. The leader collects money used for food and drinks from students and assigns everyone a job. At the time of hanami, the first years are still guests, people of soto. To the new students, hanami is a welcoming party, so the second years take care of everything from preparations to cleaning. They also entertain the first years. After hanami ends, the first years become officially members of the club. This means that their position will be reversed from the time of hanami. During the

![Image](image_url)

**Picture 24. Party Platters for Hanami**
hanami, they were ‘guests’ to be spoiled, as they were the center of attention. Afterwards, when they are full-members, they are shifted to the bottom of the hierarchy as kouhai.

During hanami season restaurants and shops offer catering, where people can order for large party platters for hanami (Picture 24). These platters usually include food fitting for the season. Most important thing is that the food is easily sharable, like sushi, chicken nuggets or riceballs. The reservations are made well ahead in time due the popularity of this type of services. During hanami season shops sell large boxes of beer that are designed for hanami use. Most of the Japanese ritual activity involve drinking sake during a communal feast, and the hanami is no exception (Ivy 1995: 135). Drinking is actually bigger part of hanami than eating. Even people who normally don’t drink, at least sip some beer. Being drunk is not seen as a shameless thing in Japan, if it is done in right circumstances. One of these circumstances is hanami when nobody looks badly those who get a little tipsy. In the past, the alcohol was naturally sake, but nowadays any alcohol is fine, the most popular drink being beer. Chuhai (diluted spirit) is also popular as it’s cheap and therefore it can be bought in large quantities.

The second years are mostly responsible of the all preparations. To second year students this is joyous event as finally they have their own kouhai, becoming senpai. When there is a big group, like in a case of sport clubs, it is necessary to arrive early to reserve a good place. Sometimes even day before. This was the case on one of my informant’s hanami, the volleyball club’s hanami. Being a sport club, the volleyball club need’s a large area for their hanami. This means, that they must do bashotori. In order to guarantee needed space, the second years start their bashotori on the previous day, spending whole night outside.

“We do bashotori, and it’s usually...in our club we usually go there day before, around 6 pm or 9 pm depending on the person in charge that year. The beginning time changes according to the person in charge, but...well, it’s usually around the sunset. During the bashotori...well, there are some senpai who come to see their kouhai. And those senpai usually bring something to eat, snacks and drinks...And till morning, the second years...well, take a nap now and then, spending time... And at the sunrise around 9 am... no, no way that it starts at 9. Starting from 11 am. The other people start slowly gather, so, the second years guide them...” (J3M21).

Shakai hanami

Shakai is often used as a synonym to a word “society”. To be more precise, shakai means the Japanese working society. Unemployed people, housewives and students, those who aren’t working are not part of shakai. Consequently the social status shakaijin means “a full-fledged member of the society”, a person who have role in the society and contributing to it. Age or education level doesn’t matter, as even a high school graduate is considerate a shakaijin if they choose to work instead of pursuing further education. Becoming shakaijin is the ultimate goal of education. In
Japan, companies have fixed dates they are looking for new employees. During this job hunting period, fourth year students in all universities around the Japan fight to find a job so that they can become shakaijin. Because the job hunting starts while they are still students, graduates should have a placement secured when they graduate.

Hanami is not a mandatory that is done by all companies and organizations. The final decision is made by supervisor or owner. Still, to many companies hanami is a tradition, especially to companies with long history. Once hanami becomes a part of annual schedule, a tradition, it is very hard to stop. Traditions are held in high regard and no one wants to break a tradition started by their predecessors. Weather is also not an obstacle, as hanami that has become an organization’s tradition is usually kept at the same place at the same time every year regardless. Once I saw a company hanami being held in a strong wind that had drove all other hanami groups away. The employees had to raise one side of the sheet they were sitting on to give some protection from the wind, with a poor success.

Preparations for shakai hanami progress similarly to university hanami, with few exceptions. The money used for hanami comes from company’s founds, hanami being a part of the annual budget. Someone with more experience is chosen to supervise the preparations and direct new employees of the procedures. Food is
always reserved from a restaurant and the person in charge usually has a list of the usual suppliers available. What is eaten, changes regionally. In Fukuoka and Sapporo the most popular food is barbeque, in Sapporo everyone grills Genghis Khan, a local specialty made from mutton. However, in Tokyo there are too many people, making barbeque being therefore both unwise and, in some areas, prohibited. Sometimes empty cardboard boxes are set in the middle of sheet to act as a table.

The biggest difference to university hanami is regarding alcohol, as people participating in shakai hanami are all of the drinking age. Some restaurants offer a service targeted to companies, where a barrel of beer is brought to hanami and everyone can use the tap to refill their glasses till the barrel is empty. It is traditionally hoped that eating and drinking under the blessing of cherry blossoms, the group becomes stronger and more united (Shirahata 2015: 218-222).

Usually someone of the new employees is picked for bashotori, to reserve a place for hanami that is big enough for whole company. The employee goes to a pointed location, spreads the sheets and then stays there, resting, reading a book etc. until the rest of the company arrives. There are cases when an employee, like with university hanami, stays whole night outside doing bashotori. In late years, however, the most popular parks have started to prohibit nighttime bashotori for both convenience of others and safety. The convenience of others refers to the fact that while person does bashotori, the spot is unavailable for others during this period. It is also an unspoken rule of bashotori that there should be someone at all times when reserving a place.

“There must be a person at there, or you can’t do bashotori. Plus, if it’s a park, depending on the place of course, there are recommendations of the time when you should start bashotori, but there are still people that spend a night. That’s against good manners.” (J11W41).

It is still possible to leave a note on the sheet that tells the company’s name and the time of hanami. In this case, the sheet is free to use till the time indicated on the note. Yet even with this method there are rules to follow. In two interviews was mentioned a case that had made headlines in news. A new employee from a big company had made bashotori of an enormous size. After writing a note, the employee then left. Although the procedures employee took were correct, the size of bashotori was clearly too big, “lacking a common sense” (J9W23). Later, after the case had been broadcasted in news, the company announced a formal apology for their employee’s mistake.

The hanami’s aim is to act as a welcome party to newcomers. As the year begins in April, the season of cherry blossoms, to many it seems only logical to have hanami and the welcoming party at the same time. During shakai hanami, there are usually games, which help people to get to know each other, to introduce the new employees, their new kouhai, to the other staff. To second year employees this is also an exciting time, as they finally graduate from the lowest level of hierarchy by having their own kouhai. As newcomers’ senpai, all are appointed respective kouhai, whom they look after and teach the work to. In Japan, people rarely change company and
consequently Japanese companies are constructed in an assumption that an employee enters to the company as new graduate and stays there till their retirement. Therefore, the company becomes like a second family to employees for the most of their lives.

Hanami begins and ends with a speech, usually by the organizer of the event. In some cases, a new employee is chosen to also give a speech, as a representative of all new employees. After the final speech, people clean up their spot and gather in a ring. In this ring, people thank each other for their time and the event ends in bow and goodbyes. Then people separate to those who are going home, and those participating to afterparty, usually held either in a restaurant, bar or karaoke.

Others

Of course, the life stages mentioned above are not a conclusive list of all hanami groups. There are also other groups, like relatives, friends, voluntary organizations and many other social groups, which may gather to celebrate hanami. Here it depends on individual’s choices and interest, what kind of and how many hanami they participate in current year. People with wide social network might have several hanami, I’ve even heard of cases when someone has to choose between two or more hanami.

Hanami is something every Japanese does at least at some point of their life. It is difficult to imagine a person who could avoid hanami their whole life, as it is an event celebrated in many different social groups and in many shapes. When asked during interviews about people who won’t do hanami, all the answers were similar:

“Someone not doing hanami? ...There usually is one at a company or at a school, so...a person who doesn’t work or go to school might not do hanami. (laughing) ...but even that kind of person, even if there is no company, do hanami themselves. With their family or friends.” (J1W26).

Although cherry blossom is declared as the most loved flower in Japan by many Japanese, this of course doesn’t mean that everyone thinks so. During an interview I asked from an informant did she know someone who doesn’t like cherry blossoms, and after thinking a while she said that there was one person. This person didn’t just not like cherry blossoms, but was afraid of them. “She says, that she feels like she is overpowered by cherry blossoms looming over her.” One cherry blossom researcher (Mizuhara 2014: 12-15) explained how as a child she hadn’t really liked cherry blossoms, as the park near her house would become packed with people just sitting and looking up saying “how beautiful”. This annoyed her and made her actually dislike cherry blossoms. Only when she entered to the university and found poems, she started to understand the admiration towards cherry blossoms. There are also people who are allergic to the pollution of cherry blossoms. These people are usually unable to participate hanami culture even if they would like to.
6 Cherry Blossom Symbolism

“...flowers are also part of culture; firstly, because they have been brought under cultivation by mankind and, secondly, because they are used throughout social life, for decoration, for medicine, in cooking and for their scents, but above all in establishing, maintaining and even ending relationships, with the dead as with the living, with divinities as well as humans.” (Goody 1993: 2).

A cherry blossom, or *sakura* (桜), is one of the two Japan’s national flowers, other being a chrysanthemum. While the chrysanthemum symbolizes the Emperor and the royal bloodline, the cherry blossom represents whole nation. Now cherry blossoms are seen as one of the strongest symbols uniting Japan. (Porrasmaa 2013: 238; Satou 2014:66). This can especially be seen during the blooming season of cherry trees when practically whole nation gathers to view the flowers in their glory.

Originally all cherry trees grew wild in the mountains, but currently these trees have been planted all across the country. Places where there almost certainly are cherry trees include schoolyards, parks, gardens, road- and riversides. As a result, when all cherry blossoms open at the same time the whole country seems to be engulfed by a great pink cloud. (Asari 2012: 5). While the first color that comes in mind when talking of cherry blossoms, is the (cherry blossom) pink, all of them actually are not pink. Being cultivated for centuries, there are over 300 species of cherry trees. The blossoms colors, size and shape vary greatly, from white to crimson and yellow to green. The most loved species is still *someiyoshino* that has had a long-lasting popularity since Edo period (1603-1868). (Asari 2012; Satou 2014: 2). Although the most popular cherry tree today is someiyoshino, the *yamazakura*, the wild cherry
trees growing naturally on the mountains long before the cultivation of cherry trees started, was actually the original cherry tree type that started the long-lasting admiration towards these flowers (Corona Books 2006: 10). Even though cherry trees are native trees in Japan, there are only 10 wild cherry tree species in Japan. Most of the species have been cultivated. Wild cherry trees are also rarer, growing usually deep in the mountains, and therefore not easily accessible to casual tourists without a car. Most of the cherry trees seen in Japan, are planted, their place purposefully decided. Usual places to find cherry trees include school yards, parks, river banks and castle grounds. In the year 2017, there were news of the new wild cherry tree type being found at Kii Peninsula in Wakayama prefecture. In 2018, Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute made an official announcement that for first time in hundred years, a new wild cherry tree had been found. (The Nikkei 13.3.2018).

In East Asia, the cultivated flowers are mostly tree flowers. In fact, most of the fruit trees are grown for their flowers, not for fruits like in Europe. In Japan, the cherry tree is the epitome of preferring flowers over fruits. Because the flowers are so loved, many species have been cultivated to produce magnificent blossoms, which has made most of the cherry trees inedible. Rather than concentrating on the functional side of the cherry tree the focus is on its aesthetic side, the fruits left mostly ignored. Even when made edible, Japanese prefer the flower over the fruit. Example, during traditional weddings, the guests are offered to drink an infusion made of cherry blossoms (Picture 27) that symbolizes the happiness of the new couple, instead of drinking a drink made of cherries. (Chamberlain 1979: 89; Goody 1993: 4-5, 350, 241.)

![Picture 27. Cherry Blossom Tea](image-url)
In a way, cherry blossoms mean to Japan pretty much the same as a rose in the Western world. Both are quite multilayered, carrying many different symbolic meanings, for which they have been used to convey emotions and ideas or to manipulate people to act. Example, in Mediterranean rose was described in literature as the most beautiful among flowers, symbolizing luxury. However, it also symbolized “the evanescent nature of pleasure,” warning of the inevitable end of all things, very much in the same way as the cherry blossom does in Japan. When the world flower is mentioned, it is the rose that usually comes first in to mind in the Western world, and the cherry blossom in Japan. “The cherry is first among flowers, as the warrior is first among men.” (Chamberlain 1979: 56, 89). This is a famous saying in Japan. It means that both are supreme among their own and therefore in a special position. If not specified, the Japanese word meaning flower, hana, means exclusively cherry blossoms (Moilanen 2013: 40). Cherry blossoms have a special place in Japanese culture. But has its significant position lasted, or has modernized Japan forgotten the symbolism and importance of cherry blossoms? Through the times cherry blossoms have embodied many meanings with them: sometimes they have symbolized cyclical life, sometimes reincarnation, sometimes love, sometimes glory of short life. The list is endless. (Porrasmaa 2013: 240).

6.1 The Beauty of Ephemerality

“There really isn’t a flower of the same color. Trees are usually green, right? And tree trunks are brown right? And because of that, how should I put it? It has an unusual color, that doesn’t last so long, right? The color is beautiful.” (J2M23).

![Picture 28. Unique Colour Combination](image-url)
What first strikes about cherry blossoms, is the visual beauty. A pale pink colored petals and black trunk is a unique combination, dearly loved in Japan. The colors were brought up during all interviews. Japan has their own set of colors, and sakura-iro, cherry blossom color, is one of the most used all around the year. It is familiar and collectively loved (Corona Books 2006: 10). In the case of most trees, trees branches are first filled by leaves and flowers then bloom on this green background. Cherry tree’s leaves sprout only after the flowers have finished their bloom and scattered. As result, tree branches are burst by pale pink blossoms during the blooming season.

The day I first arrived to Japan to conduct research, I happened to overhear a conversation between elderly ladies in a train. As sakura zensen had already informed that it was the time for kaikan, opening of flower, they were expectantly looking outside for the blossoms. For their disappointment, none was seen. One of the ladies tried to comfort others by saying, “Look, flowers on that one branch are starting to bloom.” “No, it shouldn’t be just a one branch. The bloom should be bursting!” another lady answered while waving her hands in big motion to emphasize her point. As cherry trees have been planted all across Japan, when the flowers bloom all at once, they create an illusion that large pink cloud has descended, spreading out all over the country. This came up during the interviews, when informants were asked, what made cherry blossom such a special flower in Japan. During a participant observation, for example, an informant picked up a fallen blossom and explained, that when looking at just one flower, its appearance isn’t actually that spectacular. Then she pointed around us. “But when there are this many flowers blooming, they are stunning, right?” It is true, that sheer amount of flowers during the blooming season is overwhelming. This image of cherry blossoms blooming in a mass is largely due to someiyoshino.

Despite the large variety of cherry tree species, the first people think when they talk about cherry blossom is someiyoshino, as it has been spread all across Japan and is therefore the most common cherry tree in Japan. The big part of someiyoshino’s popularity is due to the fact that trees are genetically clones of each other, thanks to the way they are cultivated. This ensures that all trees grow flowers of same shape and color. As these identical flowers also bloom and fall at the same timing, it makes an impressive landscape. Compared to someiyoshino, the wild cherry tree species that use normal pollution, yamazakura, all are little different from each other, just like humans with their different faces (Picture 29). (Katsuki 2015: 40-82; Satou 2014: 14-18). This special feature of someiyoshino has led to the impression that cherry blossoms need to be blooming in a mass for be enjoyed (Kurita 2001: 19). Some go as far as to say, “Cherry blossom equals to someiyoshino” (Katsuki 2015: 40-82). The landscape where these cherry blossoms bloom and scatter in unison fits perfectly to Japanese ethos, mentality promoting harmony, wa. Harmonious coexistence can be seen in a way how cherry blossoms are admired in masses, not seen as beautiful on their own. The cherry blossoms’ way of living is perceived to be same as admired way of bushido, thus the blossoms reflect the beauty of heart, more specifically Japanese soul, yamato damashii. (Moriya 2013: 62-63). Still, in the recent years there have become numerous ways to enjoy of cherry blossoms. Ippon sakura, where there
is only one tree on the site, have gained popularity. Also, wild cherry trees, not cultivated nor planted, have regained their popularity. (Katsuki 2015: 7-8; Satou 2014: 19).

Although a single cherry blossom itself is often said to be surprisingly plain, individual petals are quite unique, having a cleft at the tip that gives them a heart-like shape. The easiest way for beginner to differentiate cherry tree from other similar type of trees, like plum tree or peach tree, is to look petals for this cleft. When these petals start to fall, swirling slowly towards the ground, the Japanese are moved by complex emotions. Sometimes when cherry blossoms are falling, even sakurafubuki may occur. On a windy day, a gust of wind sometimes blows fallen petals in the air. If there are many cherry trees, and therefore lots of petals, this may create an illusion where the whole field of sight is filled by dancing petals, pretty similar to a snow blizzard.

Even today cherry blossoms evoke strong feelings in Japanese. The image of cherry blossom has long history that has been purposely cultivated in arts throughout the country’s history. Because of its long history, the cherry blossom has been integrated very deeply into Japanese culture. As Japan is a culture of feelings, the world is experienced from an emotional disposition. In Western world’s aesthetics the focus is on traits that can be sensed by five senses. In contrary, Japanese aesthetics the focus is not on the form but on emotions, the feelings evoked. Consequently, the Japanese aesthetics cannot be fully explained by the Western terms. For this reason, many Western researches are baffled with Japanese aesthetics. The Japanese aesthetic terms must be experienced to understand them. In the Japanese culture of feelings, symbols and metaphors are necessity for expressing the formless emotions. As result, the aesthetic terms are often expressed by examples, so that their essence can be properly understood. Symbolic expression, the essence, has always been valued more.

**Picture 29. Someiyoshino Compared to Wild Cherry Trees**
than realistic description. Before the meaning can be comprehended, symbolic expressions must be understood. In case of mujō, and therefore mono no aware, the example are usually the cherry blossoms. Arts and aesthetic terms are classified by emotions that it attempts to evoke, not by art periods or style movements. (Eväsoja 2008: 25; Servomaa 2007: 31-38).

In her book, Sakura: sono sei to zoku (1996), Takagi Kiyoko introduces four emotions linked to cherry blossoms: mujōkan, juujitsukan, yuugōkan, and shinpikan. According to Takagi, these are the feelings that cherry blossoms waken in people’s hearts, although their use is not limited to cherry blossoms:

- **Mujōkan** (無常感), the perception of the evanescence of life, is the feeling of awe born along with the realization of the evanescent world, mujō. The falling cherry blossoms’ petals are one of the most used metaphors for this feeling. If cherry blossoms would keep blooming all eternity, no one would look at them twice. Their value is in the short life they have, in the way the petals gently fall fluttering in the wind. This is the way of nature, “flowers are destined to fall”. (Takagi 1996: 143-149) Beyond the time, cherry blossoms’ way of life continues to catch people’s heart, from young to old, men to women. The aesthetic term for describing mujōkan is *mono no aware*.

- **Juujitsukan** (充実感) the sense of fulfillment, refers to a satisfaction that person gets when they watch blossoms in their full-bloom. No matter how difficult life is, people feel contentment when looking up at cherry blossoms. Contrary to mujōkan, which is felt through blossoms’ fleeting lives and falling petals, juujitsukan is used mainly to the blossoms at their full-bloom. (Takagi 1996: 134-138).

- **Yuugoukan** (融合感), the sense of fusion. Through the feelings of fulfillment one has a sensation of their soul to become one with the cherry blossoms. (Takagi 1996: 138-143). The cherry blossoms are seen as a symbol of something Japanese, and therefore it comes to a metaphor to a fusion of themselves and Japan. “It is not as a flower but as a symbol to which one entrust their all to the cherry blossoms.” (Takagi 1996: 143).

- **Shinpikan** (神秘感), the sense of mysteriousness. Cherry blossoms bloom as a great mass that engulfs its surroundings for a moment. Then they disappear without a trace. There is something unsettling in the beauty of cherry blossoms, almost fearsome and sacred, that leaves people in awe. They have a sense of death with them. (Takagi 1996: 149-154).

*Mono no aware* is a symbolic expression and one of the core values of Japanese ethos (Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 228). In Heian period it was arguably the most important aesthetic term among aristocrats, highly valued in arts and architecture (Porrasmaa 2013: 201). The first time I came across to the term was during participant observation when an informant said to me, “This is called mono no aware.” When I asked what she meant, she pointed at the trees and said “This. When the petals are scattering and falling, then you can feel mono no aware.” As mono no
aware is usually associated to cherry blossoms, to falling cherry blossoms to be exact, they appeared in several interviews during the research. For this reason, among hundreds Japanese aesthetic terms I consider it as an important term, worthy for further explanation. As an aesthetic term unique to Japan there is no a direct translation for this word, although many researchers have tried. Servomaa lists approximately ten different description for mono no aware in her book, for example “a deep, emphatic appreciation of the ephemeral beauty manifest in nature and human life” and “a purified and exalted feeling, close to the innermost heart of man and nature, focusing on the beauty of impermanence and on the sensitive heart capable of appreciating that beauty”. (Servomaa 2007: 194-195). The simplest way to sum up mono no aware is Ohnuki-Tierney’s explanation: “The mono no aware represents feeling (pathos) about the thought (the fragility of life)” (Ohnuki-Tierney 1998: 228). Cherry blossoms awoke complex feelings in Japanese. Cherry blossoms are seen in a positive light, but not in a merry way, there is also a hint of sadness included when people watch the blossoms.

The most prominent character of cherry blossom is this way of living. Although its aesthetics certainly have allowed this flower to take its place in Japanese culture, the way how this flower blooms gloriously for a small moment, only to rapidly fall down like snow, has attracted Japanese to this flower for centuries. This is what truly
makes cherry blossoms beautiful in Japanese eyes, the way how fleeting and fragile their lives are. (Porrasmaa 2013: 201). The blooming time of cherry blossom is awfully short, usually only a week or two. Mankai is even shorter, just a couple of days. The moment, when the fragile petals of short living cherry blossoms fall, is the epitome of mono no aware. They represent “eternally repeating ephemerality”, as self-contradictory as it sounds, portraying the cyclic nature of the Japanese conception of time. (Moilanen 2013: 38-39).

6.2 The Sign of Spring, Season of Departures and Beginnings

“Hanami is, more than an event of looking flowers, it’s…a way of celebrating spring, to gather with everyone at spring, to celebrate…that’s why the cherry blossom is, like, a symbol of spring…” (J1W26).

The first thing a Japanese person mentions when talking about cherry blossoms would be the spring (haru 春). When the informants were asked about cherry blossoms, the topic often went straight to the spring. The connection to spring was made so swiftly that it often wasn’t even registered, being instead treated as the matter of fact. For centuries blooming of cherry blossoms has been connected to spring in Japan, evident from art and literature. Understandably so, as their blooming time is mainly in April, the month of spring. Thus, cherry blossom is officially the flower of April. (Corona Books 2006: 28). Some go as far as to say, that spring comes along with the cherry blossoms, starting when they bud and ending when the petals scatter away and the leaves appear on the branches. In a way, cherry blossoms are comparable to autumn leaves. As cherry blossoms represent the season itself, a tree blooming outside the spring season draws attention. Trees that bloom off-season, spring, are called “kurui saki”, a mad bloomer. (Katsuki 2015: 96-98). This underlines how strongly cherry blossoms are connected to spring. Cherry tree blooming in any other season must be crazy.

“In Japan, April is the beginning of a year, not January. So as a new year begins in April, so the cherry blossoms are like...a sign of the new year, that kind of feeling.” (J13W25).

Naturally, as cherry blossoms are the symbol of spring, the things connected to spring affect to the image of cherry blossom. Of all seasons, spring is the most important one, the season when a year starts. Although the year officially begins in the January 1st, in the long run it doesn’t truly affect to the Japanese daily life. To Japanese, the year truly starts in April 1st. Both financial and academic years start on April, which has a great impact to whole society. As the bloom overlaps with the time new employees and students join in, universities and companies use the hanami as a welcome ritual to new members of the group (Moriya 2013: 60). I believe Hendry describes spring most fittingly in her book (1993) as a season full of different kind of beginnings, as people prepare themselves on new phases in their lives. As result, for shops and restaurants spring is a golden time for business. At the beginning of the new academic year, children require new clothes and stationeries, new university students have to move and decorate their new apartments. As
expected, companies and shops are well-prepared for this. (Hendry 1993: 141). Not only that, but cherry blossoms have been fully capitalized for the marketing, for companies to get the most out of the season. The cherry blossom themed goods visibly multiply. The foods and drinks also have either cherry blossom taste or scent put in to them (Picture 31 & 32). Cherry blossom pastries, cherry blossom ice cream, cherry blossom hamburgers, cherry blossom latte… I have even tasted cherry blossom sausages. These seasonal products are on the shelves only for a short time, quickly disappearing after the season is over. Businesses also participate to the season by decorating their spaces according to the season, in similar way as the Christmas decoration is used in Finland.

"The meetings and departures are, like...used as metaphors for spring and cherry blossoms, so...so cherry blossoms make you feel these tear-jerking emotions.” (J7W22).

In interviews, every informant stressed how the season of cherry blossoms was the season of starts and new acquaintances. And at the same time, ends and goodbyes, as when starting something new, people also have the end something old. In order to enter university, an individual must first graduate from high school, and when starting a job, the graduation is a must. When something starts, something must also end. Aside from being the sign of spring, the appearance of cherry blossoms also marks the end of winter. This is one of the main reasons why the whole Japan waits the blooming so excitedly. The northern you go, the more significant cherry blossoms seem to become. This is only logical, the winter is remarkably colder in

**Picture 31. Blossom Yogurt, "Let's taste the season"**

**Picture 32. Cherry Blossom Pastry**
north than in south, snow piling to several meter high, trapping people in their houses. This makes the end of winter much waited occasion.

“During a winter...you think things like ‘it’s so cold, so cold!’ When cherry blossoms bloom it becomes to ‘the spring has arrived, the warm season has come’...When cherry blossoms bloom and the spring comes, you feel the new season coming, when the cherry blossoms fall, you feel the season vanishing with them.” (J9W23).

As cherry blossoms only start to bloom when temperature is warm enough, they are the first flower to tell when the coldness of winter is finally over. Yet, cherry blossom is not the only flower blooming at this season. What makes it special compared to the other flowers. One of the reasons is the availability. Cherry blossoms bloom in whole Japan, therefore acting as a collective symbol that is available to everyone. Another reason lies their short blooming period. I’ve heard many times that if the cherry blossoms lasted longer, they would immediately lose main portion of their charm. Because the season of cherry blossoms is short, is the exact reason why people feel the need to treasure the short time they can admire them.

It should be mentioned that in southern parts of Japan, the blooming season starts earlier, usually at the time of graduation when people separate from their old lives. The cherry blossom symbolism, however, is very much Tokyo centric, affected by mass media (Satou 2014: 66). Mass media keeps keenly eye on the blooming till it reaches Tokyo. After the season ends in Tokyo, the mass media’s interest slowly subsides. Hence, even while the blooming time differs from region to region, the whole country’s cherry blossom symbolism is heavily affected by Tokyo’s viewpoint. An informant commented this by saying, how he always knew that cherry blossoms are supposed to be connected to the beginning of school and new fiscal year, but as
he was originally from the south where the blooming time came sooner, it wasn’t really his personal impression. To him, cherry blossoms marked the end of school. Only after moving up to the north, he started to truly understand cherry blossom’s connection to new beginnings.

Through interviews, I got confirmation for my suspicions that the meaning of cherry blossoms changes regionally. As the blooming time depends on the air temperature, the flowers bloom faster or slower depending on their climate zone. One of the informants explained in great detail that since she had always lived in northern parts of Japan, she never really connected cherry blossoms so strongly to graduation as people in the south. Through media, she often saw the image of petals of cherry blossoms swirling around when friends separate along with the graduation but she couldn’t really connect with this image. To her, cherry blossoms are “something to enjoy with a new friends, people just met.” After entering to university and meeting people from other regions, she came to realize that in the southern Japan, cherry blossoms bloomed “at the time of separation, scattering together with us.” In short, some regions cherry blossoms are connected to the time of graduation ceremony, while in some regions they are connected to the time of entrance ceremony. Because this, in some places cherry blossoms are more strongly connected to beginnings, and in some areas to ending.

Most of the people, cherry blossoms mean a joyous event, but there are those who feel pressured. Many have to move to another prefecture for a university, away from all familiar. In the same way, many feel pressured when their new jobs start. The worst case scenario is, if one hasn’t found a job. In Japan, all companies have the same time of the year when they recruit new employees. Failure to secure job at the time means you have to wait for next year. One informant described that to her the cherry blossoms meant the beginning of mendokusai season. Mendokusai can be translated as bothersome or troublesome. In this particular informant’s case, she had just entered a company and had been appointed to give a speech as a representative of new employees during company’s annual hanami. There are many other changes along with a person’s life that clash with the cherry blossom season. As a new school year starts during the season, students change classes at this time. This means saying goodbye to old class and meeting with new classmates. Adapting to all these changes can be a very stressful experience to a person, therefore being mendokusai.

“It [a spring] is a season of beginnings. But it is also a season of endings…like, before starting with a new [class], you have to say goodbyes to your old class, so…in that sense. (…)It’s sad and, like now, you start something in a new environment…That takes a lot of energy, so, it feels tiresome…there are so many mixed feelings, like, there are things that are fun, things that are bothersome, and, you slowly begin to forget things, so there is sadness, you also feel nostalgic…Because April is the time of beginnings, there is a lot [going on]…” (J1W26).

Cherry blossoms in their constant, fast-paced cycle of blooming represent the endless reincarnation of beginnings and endings. The budding cherry blossom is seen as a sign of approaching spring and new beginnings it brings, while the scattering petals
represents the endings people must face before they can proceed to the next stage in their lives. This cycle that repeats itself annually has many different feelings mixed in, both negative and positive ones. Depending on their life situation, a person might one year have a time of their life filled with excitement and happiness while celebrating university hanami with their friends, and next year an absolutely horrible time during the blooming, not finding a job and a graduation pending. Both of these memories are present when the person looks up at the cherry blossoms in years to come. Mixed with different memories and therefore complex emotions, cherry blossoms are flowers filled with nostalgia.

“Cherry blossoms themselves, like, bloom every year and then the petals flutter down...and then they bloom again. That itself is a kind of like beginning and ending, cherry blossoms bloom swiftly, bloom beautifully, then they rapidly fall but then they will bloom again... That kind of cycle. That’s why when, watching the blossoms, you think ‘wow, cherry blossoms are so amazing’, you get a feeling like that. Like, you recall different kind of mixed feelings. It moves you deeply, making you want to cry a bit. But, it’s still not a sadness or neither fun...that kind of feeling...mononoaware.” (J1W26).

6.3 The Controversial Flower of Life and Death

“The universe represented by cherry blossoms... is full of paradoxes. The flower represent life, predicated on death, and vice versa. Pathos over evanescence derives from the juxtaposition of the height of glory and vigor of life and pomp, on the other hand, with their ephemerality, on the other.” (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 51).

Cherry blossom’s position as the symbol of spring automatically connects it to the beginnings and endings. As shown in chapter above, spring is the season when new fiscal year starts, plants grow, and new people are met. It also marks the end of the winter, and is the season when people separate and say goodbye to their old lives. Cherry blossom therefore represents both beginnings and endings, including life and death (Satou 2014: ii). In history, cherry blossom embodying the symbolism of life and death has had significant role, which has been actively used in politics. This is why its status in modern Japan is truly intriguing.

Cherry blossom is highly controversial, complex flower. Depending on the context, it can become a symbol of life and rebirth, and then in another context, it turns into a symbol of death. It can woke both joy and sadness, represent happiness and tragedy. This balance is very delicate, making the context an extremely important factor in cherry blossoms’ symbolism. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 38). Dynamics of death and life clearly visible in the flower’s way of living through seasons, people see cherry blossoms as themselves. This leads them to vividly realize how they are also living through seasons, till the end of their days (Kurita 2001: 16).
While talking with an informant about her past hanami experiences, she started to talk about her late grandmother. The grandmother had loved cherry blossoms, annually organizing hanami for the whole family. Because of that, when the informant saw cherry blossoms, they reminded her of the grandmother. As we have already established that the cherry blossoms symbolize the passage of time, it is only natural that they also remind of those that have already left this world. One informant described how by observing cherry blossoms blooming and then scattering, she could feel the flow of time, how things pass. “When the time passes things change. There are times when changes are sad, but... When animals, plants die it's sad but, there being no ending is much sadder, it would be harder...” (J6W26). The fact, that all things will eventually end, is not seen as a negative thing, but instead accepted as a natural part of life.

There is a famous short story called Sakura no ki no shita ni shitai ga umetearu! (1928), written by Motojirō Kajii. Official translation is Beneath the Cherry Trees, but more accurate translation would be “There are bodies buried beneath the cherry trees”. In the story, a protagonist comes to a conclusion that there must be bodies under the cherry trees because that is only way to explain their fearsome beauty: the bodies under the roots give their power to the tree, giving flowers their unrivaled beauty. That is the mysterious beauty left by those who have perished. (Takagi 1996: 149-154). Although written almost hundred years ago, the title is well-known all around Japan, even by those who haven’t read the story. It is often treated as an urban legend and was mentioned in five of my interviews. One informant even mentioned, that as cherry blossoms are everywhere, it wouldn’t be so strange if there really would be a body under one of them.

Perhaps inspired by this story, lately cherry blossom burials (桜葬) have gained small popularity in Japan. Instead of tombstone, a cherry tree, and therefore its blossoms, become the markers of a grave. There are also ending support centers that help people to arrange their own funeral arrangements and many of their customers prefer cherry trees over a cold concrete. The centers also offer group graves. In Japan, graves are usually family graves but lately childless singles have increased, meaning that there will be no one to visit the grave. There are also cases that children are unable to visit their parent’s grave often because of distance, busy schedule and other reasons. For these persons, the idea of “grave buddies” (葬友) is quite welcomed. (Inoue 2012: 32-51). Cherry blossoms hence bring people together even after death.

Even in “normal” graveyards, it is common to see cherry trees planted there. It was speculated by an informant that perhaps the dead also wanted to see the blossoms, and trees are planted for the sake of deceased. It is most likely true that the trees are planted for the dead. In Japan, there is an old belief that the cherry trees, especially drooping ones, act as a channel between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Trees on the burial sites are believed to help the souls on their travel (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 37). It seems that cherry blossoms are often used as a replacement for
tombstone, especially if the bodies of deceased are not retrievable. I came across two examples: The Imperial Shrine of Yasukuni and Ishinomaki.

The Imperial Shrine of Yasukuni

In spite of the magnificence of its cherry blossoms which bloom little earlier than other cherry blossoms, the Yasukuni Shrine is not a very popular hanami spot among Japanese. I visited there with a group of students and their teacher, who decided to have their hanami little earlier for me, as the cherry blossoms that year were late. “Japanese won’t usually come here for hanami”, I was told by the teacher. “The atmosphere here is too heavy.” Then he explained me a little bit of the shrine’s history with a help of a plate at the memorial on the site.

The Yasukuni Shrine, meaning ‘peaceful country’, was established in 1869 in order to house and bless the souls of those who had died in order to make Japan the land of peace. Because of this, the souls of those who died while fighting in World War II are also housed there. Some of the souls buried in Yasukuni are declared war criminals, which regularly creates tension between some countries when politicians visit the site, especially China and South Korea. Because of this the soldiers, just in case that they couldn’t return to their loved ones, bid farewells by saying, “We will meet again at the Yasukuni!” Even today, some families are honoring that promise, visiting the shrine yearly. (Karvinen 2014: 52-53). The cherry trees at the Yasukuni Shrine were planted there by Kido Takayoshi in 1870, after the Bōshin war. At the time it was hoped that the flowers’ beauty would calm down the souls of the fallen warriors, bringing them some consolation, not to promote soldiers sacrificing their lives for the nation and Emperor. This was implemented by the war propaganda during II World War. (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002: 108). The World War II is still a fairly recent war and its scars can still be seen. Consequently, the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s visit to the shrine in 2013 and annual offerings to the shrine have enraged both China and Korea time after time (Reuters 21.4.2016; BBC 26.12.2013).

To many, Yasukuni Shrine has a sacred, sad atmosphere. The trees were planted for the memory of deceased, in many cases for soldiers whose body couldn’t be returned to their families. This gives a dark shade to cherry blossoms beauty, making it a difficult place for celebration.

Ishinomaki

In March 2011, Japan was faced with tragedy known as the Great East Japan Earthquake. Affecting the whole country, many lives were lost and towns destroyed. One of the biggest victim was the town called Ishinomaki, where practically whole generation was lost when tsunami took lives of 70 elementary school students. One of the informants participates on a project started by Ryosuke Abe, a grandfather of two children who lost their lives during the tragedy. As the area had become unlivable, Abe decided to start a voluntary project to plant 269 cherry trees, the same number as the area’s victims, on the valley where the children passed away. The trees
were donated by a firm from Nagano prefecture, which grows cherry trees and university students and former residents of the city plant them as volunteers.

In this case, the act of planting cherry trees is a form of mourning to the parents and relatives. From many aspects, this is the same as in Yasukuni Shrine’s case. More importantly, as the life of cherry trees lives in many cases exceed that of human, the cherry blossoms will continue annually remind of those small children. To the parents and relatives, this might be only way to have some condolence to their sorrow: even if time continues to pass, their children will not be forgotten. The deceased will be remembered every time the cherry trees bloom. Abe himself has commented this by saying, “I hope that the souls of those locals who died, including my grandchildren, will dwell on the blossoms, and make the blossoms bloom.” (Yomiuri 21.11.2016).

More than anything, people are hoping that those whose life ended abruptly in tragedy, will find happiness and peace in the next world. At another site in Ishinomaki where the locals planted 1000 cherry trees for same purpose. The chief priest who chanted the sutra at the planting of 1000th tree, explained that as the cherry blossom is a flower that has the sentiments “I shall never forget” and “I will always watch over you” imprinted in them, there is no flower more fit for this position. (Kahoku Shinbun 7.11.2017).

6.3.2 Admirable Life force

Although at the first glance it seems that the cherry blossoms are closely related to death, by being usually connected to memories of deceased and a ‘beautiful death’, they are also connected to a life. In the ancient Japan, where cherry blossom was compared to rice, the cherry blossom was seen having a life-sustaining energy. After all, cherry blossoms at their full bloom are a perfect metaphor for a short but powerful, impressive life with an equally magnificent end.

Franz Krause compares seasonal variations to the changes in individual’s life by saying, “Seasonal variations seems to belong to life, just like the variations any person experience in the course of growing up and ageing.” (Krause 2013: 17). This fits perfectly to cherry blossoms which are often used as a metaphor for human life itself. Generally it is seen that cherry tree and its blossoms live in the same pace as people in Japan. Cherry blossom depict an idealized way of human life in their way of blooming gloriously while they can and gallantly accepting their end when the time comes. The tree itself has a life expectancy comparable to man’s one, especially in case of someiyoshino, with its expected lifespan being 80 years. This has naturally had a great impact on the way cherry trees are seen. Parents of newborn may apply for a free cherry tree. The tree, planted on yard, then grows along with the child. Someiyoshino is at its most impressive stage at the age of 20-30, after which blooming starts slowly weaken (Katsuki 2015: 80-82). This is also comparable to human, as human body’s regeneration stops around this time and people start to age. As the tree’s usage value for hanami becomes lower after this period, the cherry tree have an image of being short lived. There are, however, exceptions. The oldest
someiyoshino of Japan that is still blooming locates in Hirosaki. Planted in 1882, the tree is over 130 year old (Picture 34).

Although cherry blossoms are described to be fleeting, there is still permanence with them, thanks to repetition. The blossoms may fall, but the tree stays, continuing to bloom year after year. This fact, predictability, that the flowers will bloom again, is a very important part of cherry blossom’s image. Some Japanese even use cherry blossom as an example in their dystopian scenario, where the flowers might disappear due to global warming and other phenomena (Iwatsuki 2013; Katsuki 2015: 186-197). This is partly done for shock value, because the disappearance of cherry blossoms would affect everyone, directly or indirectly. The expected annual landscape would not come, nor could anyone have hanami. From Japanese perspective, this is a quite scary prospect.

“I just thought about it but if cherry blossoms... if, by chance, all the flowers would waste away, not blooming ever again, it would be really sad. Because they do bloom again it’s not sad I think.” (J6W26).

While walking at the ruins of Sendai castle, I talked to an elderly man on his 70’s working there as a voluntary guide. When the conversation turned to cherry blossoms, he told how every year he visits The Three Great Cherry Blossom Trees, the three eldest cherry tree in Japan, the eldest being approximately 1800 year old (Hirade 2016: 101). “Even though they are so old they continue blooming,” the man said and continued by saying that this year they weren’t yet blooming when he went, which was really disappointing. “But there is always the next year;” he stated. Although the cherry blossoms are usually connected to the shortness of life, the cherry tree itself possesses an amazing life force, some species continuing to bloom
for a thousands of years. One of these three trees, the Miharu-Takizakura, is just 50 km from the site of Fukushima’s power plant, where a nuclear disaster happened after tsunami 2011. Still, the tree bloomed just a month after the disaster, filling people with hope. (Demetriou 22.4.2011). “If the flowers are doing their best, then we also must do so,” was declared on the documentary the Tsunami and the Cherry Blossom (2011) directed by Lucy Walker. In this dark time, cherry blossom became the symbol of hope, an example that people should gather themselves and continue living. As a symbol of new beginnings, the flowers encouraged people to have a fresh start.

"During the normal daily life, everything keeps repeating itself, so like...Something begins and something ends, because something is beginning, something is at the same time ending...Like, cherry blossoms, like, put their all in one, two weeks that their bloom, right? 'I'm starting to bloom!', 'I'm blooming!', 'Goodbye!', it does this all in one week., so...they [cherry blossoms] shows how they live their lives to the hilt, so...by admiring them you start to think things that you normally won't.” (J7W22).

Cherry blossoms put all their energy in the blooming, nothing is done half-heartedly. In Japan this is the admired way of being, having resolve to give your all till the end. The vitality that cherry blossoms show while blooming is something people would like to be shared with. While talking with another informant, she said, “When cherry blossoms' petals fall, doesn't it seem like the cherry tree is sharing its vitality with you?” The cherry blossoms may be momentarily but the tree itself have a long life. “There are trees that are really old right? Like, over thousand year. Because there are things like that, I think the cherry blossoms are mysterious flowers.” This reminds that at the time when people gathered under blossoming cherry trees to celebrated the mountain god’s descend, cherry tree used to be a place for praying (Mizuwhara 2014: 17-18; Tanaka 2003: 21-22). Although this is no longer widely remembered, the sacred origins still seem to unconsciously affect how cherry blossom is viewed, people hoping for tree to share its vitality with them.

6.4 The Symbol of National Identity

“And cherry blossoms are kind of, how to put it, cherished, everyone likes them. Everyone has the common appreciation towards them.” (J7W22).

Although there are also other flowers that bloom during the spring, none has spread as widely as cherry blossom, to grow across the whole country (Katsuki 2015: 2). Because cherry trees have spread all across Japan, from the most southern island to the most northern point of Japan, it has effectively become a connecting factor for all Japanese. Special credit of this goes to someiyoshino. As mentioned before, someiyoshino are all clones, therefore they look relatively same. It creates mental unity when the exactly same tree can be seen all across the country (Satou 2014: 14-18). Despite the fact that their importance as a symbol of cultural identity has diminished, everyone in Japan has memories connected to the cherry blossoms,
making them collectively and individually significant flowers. Cherry blossoms are still often used to reflect both Japan and Japanese (Iwatsuki 2013: 150).

At the beginning my research, I was troubled by the thought, why cherry blossom? Why not, let's say, plum blossom? Even now, after researching cherry blossoms for few years, I find it occasionally difficult to distinguish cherry blossoms from plum blossoms, so the appearance is not the only factor for cherry blossom’s special treatment in Japanese culture. I came to the conclusion, that there are two main factors that make cherry blossom special. The first reason is that plum blooms in winter and therefore is a symbol of winter season. As Japanese are more fascinated by autumn and spring, the plum automatically loses in attractiveness. The cherry blossom’s connection to spring, the most important season in Japan, instantly raises its symbolical status. But the more important is the plum blossom strong link to China. During the Heian period, in order to endorse Japanese national identity, the cherry blossom was purposely favored over the plum. This favoritism has continued to this day through arts and literature, hanami culture and mundane symbolism. Most strongly used during the World War II, cherry blossom’s symbolism had a central part of the propaganda glorifying Japanese superior spirit. There has been a lot of literature regarding the cherry blossoms and Japanese identity, and more keeps coming.

Cherry blossom is often said to represent traditional, “true” Japan (Tanaka 2003: 37). For its positive image and beautiful appearance, many companies include cherry blossom in their logos. Aside from marketing uses, cherry blossom is a popular mark used in various emblems. In family and school crests cherry blossom is well-used. Perhaps most famously it is also a symbol used by both police and army on their badges and medals. 100 yen coin also having cherry blossom on it, the frequent use of cherry blossom definitely implies cultural importance on a national level. Against my presumption, however, cherry blossom’s position as a symbol for national identity does no longer seem to be as prominent as it used to be. Although a foreigner can clearly see cherry blossom symbols are everywhere and used in marketing to mark product as “Japanese”, informants rarely mentioned nationality when talking about cherry blossoms. When directly asked, they agreed that, yes, cherry blossom indeed does symbolize Japan, especially the traditional part of Japan. If they had to find something Japanese to give to a foreign guest, they would certainly choose something with cherry blossom pattern on it. The fact that the national identity only came up after when inquired, proofs the point that although existent, symbolism’s main focus has shifted else. However, cherry blossom is still connected to national identity, an in right context awakens strong patriotic feelings (Satou 2014: 66).

During the imperialistic period in Japan’s history, Japanese soldiers planted cherry trees on the land they had conquered. This allowed soldiers to celebrate hanami in the frontline, while also easing their homesickness. In a way, this was their way of marking the conquered land as a part of Imperial Japan. Decades after the war, the cherry trees have become a popular gift to foreign countries, acting as a symbol of peace and friendship. Being delicate trees, the transfer of cherry tree samplings can be challenging. The Japanese proverb “The fools cut cherry trees, the fools don't cut
plum trees,” emphasizes the delicacy of cherry tree which easily decay from the cut area. In the past, this has led failures when transporting tree sampling to foreign countries, so gifting cherry trees is not an easy task. This further puts emphasis on how cherished gifts cherry trees are. The cherry trees and their blossoms are treated as representatives of Japan, a sense of national pride felt toward the flower. Washington’s Tidal Basin is one of the most famous places for its Japanese cherry trees outside the Japan since 1912. (McClellan 2005; Moriya 2013: 60-61; Tanaka 2003: 72-77). Helsinki also has its own park, Roihuvuori, dedicated to cherry trees donated from Japan. In 2017, 10 new cherry trees were planted at the park by Japan’s Sakura Foundation as a gift to Finland for its 100 years of independence. Because of the Finland’s latitude the blooming time of the flowers is in May, resulting the park’s annual hanami also being held in this month. (Roihuvuoren hanami-juhla, cited 20.12.2017).

Informants, who had lived outside Japan as an exchange student or otherwise, all seemed to strongly think that the cherry blossom represents Japan. When I was talking with one informant, who had studied many years in Canada and Finland. He hadn’t seen cherry blossoms for years. When I told him about my research and how I was going to travel to Japan in order to experience hanami, he sighed and said, “I’m so jealous, I haven’t seen cherry blossoms for years. I want to have a hanami!” Then he proceeded to tell, how it didn’t feel right when there wasn’t cherry blossoms blooming during spring time. This reminded me of saying, “You don’t know what you have until it’s gone.” Cherry blossom are seen differently by those who’ve for some reason missed them. This is very relatable, as when I saw birches while living in Japan, I felt strongly connected to Finland. While living in Finland, birches are just an everyday part of life, often ignored. In his book In Place/Out of Place (1996), Cresswell argued that people, things and practices are linked to particular places, and when this link is broken, the feel “out of the place” is born (Cresswell 2004:27).

The three places most famous for their cherry blossom, are Mt. Yoshino, Takato Castle Remains Park and Hirosaki Park (Hirade 2016: 98-99). At the time of cherry blossoms blooming these remote places get flooded by both Japanese and international tourists, making it difficult to get a room during the blossoms season. Some people have to book a room from other cities close-by. Out of these three places, Mt. Yoshino is the most famous one as it has been a cherry blossom viewing spot for 1300 years. Among cherry trees, there are even some declared as protected species (天然記念物) for their cultural value (Katsuki 2015: 110-112). Although cherry blossoms nationalistic symbolism has since the War, I came to notice that in some areas they are very closely connected to local identity. On my way to Hokkaido, I made a short stop at Hirosaki. According to original schedule, I wasn’t supposed to stop at Hirosaki. But while doing interviews, Hirosaki kept rising up. Some told how they had visited there, some showed pictures taken there and some asked if I was planning to go. This picked my curiosity. I changed the plans, and booked ryokan from Hirosaki. Upon my arrival, the most popular season was already passed. This was probably why I was able to find a room on such a quick notice, as the owner of the ryokan speculated. When I told that I was doing research on cherry blossoms and
hanami, he assured me that I had come to right place. “Here, in Hirosaki, we love the cherry blossoms. We are the number one cherry blossom lovers in Japan,” he told proudly. “If a tourist tries to break a branch from cherry trees, all locals will run to stop them, from elderly to children.” Here, the cherry blossom becomes an emblem of local pride. Even while being a nationwide phenomenon, cherry blossoms are heavily connected to locality (Satou 2014: 81-83).

Picture 35. Japanese Scenery at Ueno
7 Cherry Blossom Symbolism through Hanami

“Spring sends its echo through the vibrations of the cherry blossoms which, as a symbol of ephemeral life, blossom and helplessly fall down to the ground in only a couple of days. But as long as they are in full bloom, they possess the features of supreme beauty.” (Hondru 2014: 46).

The cherry blossom is a widely used symbol in Japan with many multi-layered meanings endowed to it. Cherry blossom is a symbol that is highly remarkable to Japanese culture, historically, culturally and socially. However, as a term symbol is an abstract concept, it actually tells very little of the symbol’s actual position in the culture. When studying a symbol, we must first find out symbol’s importance to the culture. If we examine the cherry blossom’s position in Japanese culture by using Ortner’s (1973) indicators, we can come to the conclusion that cherry blossom is one of the Japan’s key symbols, holding a very special position even among other symbols.

1. All Japanese informants interviewed for this thesis said that cherry blossom is a special flower and symbol in Japanese culture. This can be backed up by multiple Japanese researches that also declare the cherry blossom to be in special position compared to other flowers. Of informants, even those who themselves hadn’t special feelings towards cherry blossoms said that cherry blossom is appreciated and used much more than other flowers in Japan.

2. Japanese are rarely indifferent towards cherry blossoms. Instead, they awoke strong, emotional reactions in people. Much depending on the context, cherry blossom can affect people’s emotions both negatively and positively. In most cases, cherry blossoms are a positive sign, but there are some who are annoyed by cherry blossoms or even fear them.

3. Cherry blossoms are deeply rooted in Japanese culture, hanami ritual being one of the important examples. Not only are they in significant role in many forms of art, but also appear in daily conversations, especially during spring time, when everyone seems to show pictures of blossoms and exchange information of best locations. Having a long history, cherry blossom seems to have sneaked into every corner of Japanese culture.

4. There is a great cultural elaboration surrounding cherry blossom. It can almost be said that cherry blossom has its own vocabulary. Mono no aware, sakurafubuki, mankai, ippon sakura, these are just a few of countless examples. The symbolism surrounding cherry blossom is very complex and widely used in many different contexts.

5. Although not strictly regulated, there are some cultural restrictions surrounding cherry blossoms, for example people shouldn’t break a branch from a cherry tree. There are also several unspoken, unregulated rules
regarding hanami, which are not ordered by a law but by a society’s disapproval. Breaking these rules equals to losing a face, which is feared above all in Japanese culture. Or in case of arts, there are many strict rules that are to be followed, like with poems.

After concluding the cherry blossom’s position as the key symbol in Japanese culture, we must examine what meanings cherry blossom carries. Key symbols reveal more on the culture than other symbols, therefore it is through them that the core of culture can be reached. As cherry blossom has been used as a key symbol since ancient times it has numerous meanings implanted to it, which change depending on the context and time period. Because of this, the focus here is centering on the living flowers observed during hanami ritual in modern times.

Various primary and secondary qualities, which John Locke and Victor Turner talked about, bring up emergent qualities that are on the sensory pole of key symbol (Fernandez 2003: 187-190; Turner 1967: 28). In cherry blossoms case, its unique visual beauty plays significant part of its symbolism. To summarize the results, I’ve find followings to be symbolized by cherry blossom:

Cherry blossoms have been the sign of spring even before the written time in Japan till today, making it perhaps the most obvious symbolism connected to cherry blossoms. As spring is seen as the most important season in Japan, cherry blossoms as its symbol also enjoys the same reverence. Cherry blossoms equaling to spring, the symbolism connected to spring is naturally transferred to cherry blossom. As spring is the season of multiple new beginnings and endings, cherry blossom also becomes to symbolize these. The end of winter and the beginning of spring, the end of a fiscal year and the beginning of a new one. In this way, cherry blossom symbolizes the passage of time, that society and individual experience during the blooming season. The annual blooming of cherry blossoms creates nostalgia. Looking at the blossoms, people are reminded of their past hanami and their own life situation at that time, which they then compare to their present state. This leads them to wonder their future, are they still enjoying of the same cherry blossoms next year and who are they with. Cherry blossom is a symbol that ties past, present and future together. Of course there are some individual differences how cherry blossoms are experienced. As cherry blossoms are an annual phenomenon, every individual has their own set of past memories connected to them, reminding people of different things, making them feel different feelings. There are, however, some collective memories and feelings people have, for example, at the beginning of school, everyone has a memory of being excited and nervous. The annual blooming creates nostalgia, which plays a big part in cherry blossom symbolism. Cherry blossoms represent changes that society and individuals encounter. To quote Ohnuki-Tierney (2002: 38), “Ultimately, cherry blossoms symbolize processes and relationships.”

Aside from this, cherry blossoms are also treated as a metaphor reflecting human life itself, their way of living even seen as a model of an ideal life. Since cultivation of someiyoshino, with its life cycle and expectancy being equivalent to human’s, this link has only strengthened. This link dates back to Sengoku period, when people
suffering from ongoing wars started to parallel their own fleeting lives to cherry blossoms’. The way how they bloom vigorously only for a short time and then beautifully scatter down, without clinging onto life, is seen as an exemplary way of living one’s life in this uncertain world. Accepting ones fate is one of the highly valued qualities in Japan’s culture. The most important feature of cherry blossom as a symbol is its ability to awaken strong, complex feelings in those viewing it. The most significant of these feelings is mono no aware, which stems from the mujōkan (See Chapter 6.1). Cherry blossoms are cherished exactly because they last only a short while, making people to reflect themselves on the flower. Flowers vigorous blooming brings people joy, but their eventual demise is always present, bringing a hint of sadness even into a middle of joy. Due to scattering petals, cherry blossom have a close association to death. Meanwhile, blooming of cherry blossoms is enthusiastically waited annual event, symbol of beginnings. And as mentioned before, the fiercely blooming blossoms represent life, the ability to live life fully without holding back. This, however, is only achieved by every individual flower blooming harmoniously with all cherry blossoms. Life and death are thus both strongly symbolized by cherry blossom. This is the complexity of cherry blossom. It never present just a one thing, there are always several, underlying meanings layered on its symbolism. Sometimes these meanings are even in contradictory.

From here I would like to note the cherry blossom symbolism connected to Japanese identity. People take qualities from nature surrounding them and use those to describe themselves, to create their and their society’s identity ((Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 14-15). These qualities of object, phenomenon etc. from nature are meaningful to natives, and are taken to act as key symbol of their culture. Japanese have found qualities they respect and admire in cherry blossoms. The two qualities of cherry blossom that are most significant from the point of symbolism are the way it blooms aesthetically and harmoniously in a mass, and the way it blooms gloriously for a short time, before gracefully scattering to its own demise. The way how this plain blossom is seen glorious when blooming in a mass, is a clear metaphor for ideal Japanese society where every individual harmoniously coexist, making society stronger and beautiful. Cherry blossom has been purposefully used as a symbol of Japanese soul, yamato damashii, since Heian period. On account of how cherry blossoms were used as a part of the II World War’s Japanese war propaganda, the cherry blossom’s connection to Japanese identity was purposefully downsized. Still, the old ideals of how Japanese people should be, are still seen in cherry blossoms that represent the traditional Japan. Nowadays, local identity is more strongly present in cherry blossom’s symbolism than national identity. Example, Hirosaki, and Himeji are famous for their cherry blossoms. Annually these cities are flooding with tourists, making it difficult to get a room during the blossoms season. Some people have to book a room from cities close-by. Even while cherry blossoms reach even the farthest corner of the country and are celebrated all across the country, they are also a very local phenomenon.

In this notion, I would like to turn attention from the symbolism to the ritual, hanami. Hanami and cherry blossom are inseparable. There is no hanami without cherry blossom, and it is impossible to think cherry blossom without hanami (Takagi 1996:
As Victor Turner has said, a symbol is the smallest unit of a ritual. Thus, it’s only natural, that the meanings cherry blossom as a key symbol holds are directly transferred to hanami, a ritual build around cherry blossoms. Since hanami is a ritual, it must have a purpose. To answer the question, what is hanami, we must first find out what people believe they achieve through hanami.

In Chapter 5.1, I’ve written a relatively comprehensive descriptions of different types of hanami, dividing them to a three main categories. A traditional hanami held in a picnic style, sakura matsuri held in a festival style, and a mobile hanami, that includes many different forms of flower viewing while people move between point A and point B. In my thesis, I have concentrated on traditional type of hanami, but it should be remembered that all these are accounted as hanami, even though they’re quite distinctive from each other.

As place has meanings and values endowed to it, place itself is a symbol for something. The sites used for hanami, parks, castles, riversides etc., have their pre-existing meanings and functions, which periodically change subsequent to cherry blossoms’ blooming. When cherry blossoms bloom, new meanings become endowed to a landscape. Through the visual change, the purpose and use of places also change. They become sites for ritual activity, hanami. The best way to view cherry blossoms is to look them as a part of landscape from afar, not up close. Their true charm is, as mentioned before, in how they overwhelmingly bloom in a harmonious mass, reflecting the ideal Japanese society. The purpose of ritual is to bring the ideological background of the landscape to the foreground, to the reality of everyday life. (Hirsch & O’Hanlon 1995). Seamon and Pred (Cresswell 2004: 30-37) spoke of the everyday movements and social expectations implemented to the places. This is also true with hanami. In a first glance, hanami may seem informal, even spontaneous, event to the outsiders. However, this is only because the participants know the expected behavior patterns and act according to it, making their movement in the space seem effortless and fluent. For example, all participants know the blue sheet is considered to be uchi space, so upon their arrival they immediately take their shoes off before touching the sheet. Shakai, and sometimes university, hanami usually have speeches, and everyone know at which sequence they come and who makes them.

A place has an important role in how cherry blossoms are understood during hanami. When people go to Yasukuni or Ishinomaki to admire the flowers, there is a hint of sadness and respect in the air. People are reminded of those, who have passed away in tragic events. Meanwhile, when people visit the Three Great Cherry Blossom Trees, they are struck awe by the life power these trees still display. This fills them with feeling that they themselves should take an example and live long, healthy lives.

**Hanami as a celebration of spring.** At the time of blossoming, the society not only transfers to a new season, but also to a new year. Hanami, along with the cherry blossoms, is a part of an annual rhythm moving the whole society. Every spring people around Japan gather to practice this same activity, therefore connecting people to society. Through cherry blossom being a symbol of spring, the season of beginnings and endings, hanami as an activity celebrates not only the end of winter
and the coming of spring, but also all new endings and beginnings that season brings with it. Franz Krause (2013) explained in his essay, how seasons are a mixture of natural phenomena and activities conducted by people, thus being rhythmical interaction between nature and humans. Japan’s spring could be said to epitomize this, as spring in Japan is equivalent to hanami, social activity, and cherry blossoms, nature’s phenomenon. As a ritual, hanami is all about processes, changes and passages.

**Hanami as a rite of passage.** As shown by Joy Hendry (1999), there are four types of rite of passages: The passage of people from one status to another; the passage from one place to another; the passage from one situation to another; and the passage of time. All of these can be found in hanami. As hanami is a celebration of spring, its status as the passage of time is perhaps most apparent. Hanami can be divided to two layers that celebrate the passage of time: society and individual. Society welcomes the new season, as the new fiscal and educational year starts. Along with it come various changes, meetings and farewells. The changes that occur in the society then affect to an individual. However, how individual’s life is affected, depends greatly on their life stage, and the group they are celebrating with. Hanami with family, friends or relatives is about making memories with those close to you. In case of university and shakai hanami, main purpose is to act as a welcome party to new members of the group, and partly as a way of making the group closer. In Japanese society, passage of status and situation are closely intertwined, as when people’s situation, new job or class, changes, their status changes. Due new job (situation), people become both shakaijin and kouhai (status). During certain life stages, hanami acts as a rite of passage for people to become a part of a specific uchi group. At hanami, people enter in uchi both social and spatial sense. Hanami’s purpose is to act as a liminal period (Turner 1967; van Gennep 1960) for new members integrating to the group. During the hanami, newcomers are not yet full-fledged members of the uchi, but guests to be entertained and introduced. In spatial sense, by placing a blue sheet on the ground, the group temporarily claims that area as their territory, uchi. Because of this, people treat the blue sheet as an inside space, taking their shoes and putting them in line next to the sheet in similar way as they take their shoes of at the entrance before entering a house. For the period of hanami, this place where group is having their hanami, is “owned” by them. Entering to this space acts as a passage from one place to another, when they step from outside to inside of the uchi.

All changes occurring during the season are highly stressful, draining people. When falling petals fall on to them, people feel like tree is sharing its life force to them. Therefore hanami is also a session of recharging one’s energy in the middle of changes that come along with the cherry blossoms at spring. Hanami offers a breathing moment, allowing individuals to adjust to these changes. Hanami is a momentarily separation from mundane space and time, a moment of enjoyment with people of their uchi, the inside group. The most important part of the seasonal events is strengthening the bonds between members of the community (Moilanen 2013: 130).
8 Afterwords

As Japanese culture differs greatly from Western culture and is some situations even incomparable to other cultures, it is a difficult task to try translate its symbolism in understandable form. Because of this, in this thesis I had to first prepare reader to understand both cultural and historical context, so that the importance of cherry blossom to Japanese culture would come properly across. For example, without explaining the Japanese nature relationship it would be difficult to understand how strongly cherry blossoms are connected to Japanese identity that promotes Japanese being closer with nature than the West. Or without explaining Shinto and its kami system, understanding how cherry blossom is seen from Japanese perspective is difficult. This, however, made the thesis’s length to stretch.

There were also few points that I noticed during the analyzing phase but left unmentioned for the lack of wider material, topic being outside of scope of thesis’s theme etc. As most of informants gathered for this thesis are female, this unevenness also made it difficult to make further speculations. Therefore, I have decided to put these thoughts that came up here, as they deserve to be mentioned.

From interviews, I noticed that hanami seemed to be more important to people between ages 18-30. To people from older age group, hanami didn’t seem to hold that special meaning. “To me, it is just a seasonal event. Like Christmas” is a typical type of answer I got from this age group. This might be because the people of age group 18-30 have most of changes happening during their lives that overlap with cherry blossoms. University students have their own hanami culture. To people entering the company, hanami marks an important turning point in their life. And usually people have their first child before age 30, when hanami becomes an event to observe child’s growth. Above age 30, people already have quite stable life, with little changes. If anything, to them cherry blossoms blooming is a busy time period with little time to enjoy flowers. It also seemed that women showed more interest towards symbolism, while men’s interest centered more on hanami. Women talked about what they felt and thought when they looked at the cherry blossoms, while men talked about what they did during the season. Here also is a possibility that there are some differences between age groups.

In this thesis I’ve introduced many symbolic meanings possessed by cherry blossom. Any of these meanings could be studied in its own thesis. For example, cherry blossom symbolizing Japanese identity has many layers on it, not only due to its historical context but also from local identity’s viewpoint and as a presenter of traditional Japanese culture. To quote Geertz on cultural analysis, “...the more deeply it goes the less complete it is.” (Geertz 1973: 29), I also feel like I’ve just scratched the surface with this thesis.
## References

### Research Material

#### Recorded Interviews

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